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NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

REG. U.S. PAT. OFF.

THE GREEN SCARAB

"Look there!" cried Nick. "Those are Spanish words; *'en la vida, y el muerte'*—in life and death."

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REG. U. S. PAT. OFF.

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THE GREEN SCARAB;

OR,

Nick Carter's Beautiful Mystery.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

THE THREE ROBBERIES.

"Nick, did anybody ever tell you about the Balm of Gilead tree?"

"About any particular one, do you mean?" the detective asked.

"No; about a peculiarity in regard to all of them," his companion in the study replied.

"Perhaps. Something about their roots, isn't it?" Nick Carter smiled as he asked the question.

"Yes; distinctly about the roots. I had a friend once in the State of New Hampshire, who owned a beautiful house. There was a lawn, too, which was the pride of his heart. Once somebody presented him with a young Balm of Gilead tree. He planted it in the middle of his lawn. Then he went to Europe. He was absent three years, as it happened; business detained him. When he returned, the lawn had turned into a grove of Balm of Gileads."

"You don't say! What is the inference, William?"

The man addressed was one of the commissioners of police, who had once been connected with the United States Treasury Department; who, when he sent his name to Nick Carter, did not always send his own.*

"Wait a moment. He gave some orders. His men got busy. They cut down all the little trees, and the big one, too; leveled the lawn, and restored it to its former beauty. My old friend went away again, and returned the following autumn. When he got back, there was another flourishing grove, twice as thickly grown as the first one. It was a regular forest that time."

"What's the inference? I haven't caught on yet."

"This: You went after the mysterious robber of the train, whom we named Cartouche, who had twice robbed Santiago Webster of nearly half a million in the two holdups, and you thought you got him; but you didn't. Anyhow, you left the roots in the soil."

"Is this some new form of a joke you are working on me, William?"

*See preceding NICK CARTER WEEKLY, "A Mysterious Robber."

"No joke about it, Nick; I wish there were."

"Then, won't you explain?"

"Sure thing. That is what I came here to do. I haven't seen you since——"

"Since the last time I saw you; no."

"That was when I came here at midnight, not long ago, to ask you to take the case of my friend Santiago Webster."

"Correct. I took it, too. I didn't much like the plan of it as outlined by Webster, but I took it. Well?"

"Yesterday you arrested the bunch of them—Cartouche and his gang—as you thought, as they were on the point of sailing away from New York for Europe. You sent them to headquarters, and you were to follow along very soon afterward, taking Webster with you; but Webster came without you."

"Oh, well, I hadn't the time to go to headquarters just then. I was called in another direction, very unexpectedly, and as there was no apparent reason why I should go with Webster, I sent him directly to you to explain the circumstance. You see, William, he didn't care a rap about the money he had lost; he only wanted to see the woman."

"What woman? That is, which woman? There were two."

"The one who robbed him. He insisted that it was a woman who did rob him."

"Well, she wasn't there."

"What?"

"The woman who robbed him—wasn't there. At least, he says she is not either of the two who were arrested aboard the steamer, or when they were about to board it, whichever was the case."

"Do you believe him?"

"Yes."

"He was rather smitten with the woman, I think, notwithstanding the fact that she has taken more than half a million dollars away from him in her three efforts—if the thief really is a woman, after all; and—wait a moment—it is possible that he might deny her identity, now, in order to let her go free. He is so rich that he doesn't care about the loss of the money, and he is so impressionable that her beauty staggered him. He admitted as much to me. He has probably denied her identity deliberately."

"You wouldn't think so if you had seen him at headquarters, Nick."

"Why not?"

"Well, to put it into one short word, he was mad; mad clear through.

"What was he mad about, and who was he mad at?"

"He was mad because the woman wasn't there, and he was thoroughly mad at all who were there, because they had assisted in fooling him."

"Huh." It was a grunt that the detective uttered, and that is the only way it can be spelled; but it was expressive.

"You see, Nick," his companion continued, "it wouldn't have been necessary for Webster to deny the identity of either of the women, in order to get them free. He could have pocketed his loss, refused to prosecute, or have denied that there had been any robbery at all, and we wouldn't have had a leg to stand on. In fact, he admitted that he had made up his mind to do something of the sort, until he arrived at the headquarters building, and found that the real robber had hoodwinked all of us. Then he was mad. He swore that he would know her among ten thousand, and that she wasn't there; he also swore that he would spend his last dollar to send all that bunch—every one of them—to prison, and that he would find more to spend to assist in the search for the real Cartouche."

"Oh; he did, eh?"

"Yes."

"Well, all that I have got to say about it is that before I make any effort to find her, or anybody else, for Mr. Santiago Webster, ex-cow-puncher, cattle king, and multimillionaire, he has got to make affidavit to the facts, and swear that he will prosecute her, when found."

"He'll do that. He's mad at her, too."

"Oh, is he? He will probably get over it as soon as he sees her face again."

"Possibly; but you will have him, if you insist upon the affidavit; and he is in the mood to make one, now. He is downstairs, you know. I brought him here with me."

"Yes. I know. Did the whole bunch that was at the steamer, and arrested there, get safely to headquarters?"

"Yes."

"They numbered the same as the lot that I trailed from Jersey."

"I know; but, you see, they must have rung in a dummy on us. Our Cartouche, whether the name applies to a man or a woman, is smart."

"I am convinced that Cartouche is a woman," said the detective.

"Well, she is a smart one, then. There is no mistake about that. She leaves nothing to chance; she arranges every last detail, beforehand—and to a nicety. Right here I can see just how this thing happened as it did."

"Tell me your ideas about it. I think—if it is true that Cartouche is not among the prisoners—that I can see the point, too."

"Give me, first, an outline of just what happened on that train from Washington. I want to hear it from you, Nick."

"You know I went to Washington with Webster, in the character of a cow-puncher named Sid Bickford; that Chick followed along, with a make-up exactly like mine in every detail; that in the Union Station, in Washington, when Webster was ready to return to New York without bringing Sid Bickford along with him, Chick and I changed places, and that he, acting as the character I had been playing, bade Webster good-by at the station, and returned to the hotel, while I, in another disguise, got aboard the train—the same car—with Webster, and occupied the chair next to the stateroom that he had taken. You know about all that?"

"Yes. But go on. I want it from you."

"I'll cut it short, if you don't mind?"

"As short as you like."

"Cartouche had committed the two previous robberies of Webster on that train; that is, on the train that leaves Washington at that time. The first time, two years ago, she was disguised as a man; the second time, a year ago, she appeared as an old woman. On the first occasion she stepped into the stateroom, closed the door after her, and pointed an instrument that appeared to be a bamboo cane at Webster's head and face, threatening to burn his eyes out with vitriol if he reached for a gun, or resisted her; and she convinced him that she could do it, by shooting a drop or two of the terrible stuff against the backs of Webster's hands. She made him give up."

"It was rather a convincing argument that she used. I am not sure that, under the circumstances, I would not have given up, too."

"The second time, that same deadly argument was employed; that was when she played the old-woman part."

"Yes."

"And Webster was convinced that she would try the same sort of a game, a third time, performing it in the same place, and very nearly in the same manner. Webster convinced you that he might be right about it, and ultimately he convinced me, also."

"Yes."

"I was on the train in a disguise that even Webster did not know. I occupied the chair nearest the door of his stateroom. Well, at Baltimore, where the first robbery took place, and where Cartouche made her escape the first time, nothing happened. Farther north, where it happened the second time, nothing happened. When we got to Philadelphia, nothing had happened, and I had about made up my mind that nothing of the sort would happen."

"Naturally."

"Webster had kept close to his room, waiting for something to happen, but at Philadelphia he stepped outside the car, upon the station platform, for a breath of air. I wanted to smoke, and I wanted to keep an eye on him, and I went outside, too. The stop was three or four minutes; but, as it happened, it was long enough. Cartouche had used the interval to introduce herself into the stateroom, and when Webster returned to it, from the station, he did not discover her until he had closed the door. After that, he couldn't help himself."

"Not with that vitriol gun pointed at his eyes; not very well."

"This time—the third time—she was a beautiful young woman; so Webster says."

"Well?"

"Well, we had got well along into Jersey when the train came to a stop with a jerk. The engineer had applied the emergency brakes. It was a jolt, a jar, and a stop. I stepped to the platform of the car to discover what had happened. I was gone only a moment. When I returned, I thought it strange that Webster had taken no notice of the stop. I attempted to go to him, but the door was locked. The porter was near at hand. He unlocked the door at my command. Webster was inside the room, all right, but he had been drugged and robbed, as before, and the robber had disappeared. And that isn't all."

CHAPTER II.

SHREWDEST OF THEM ALL.

"No; I know it is not all," said the commissioner. "I would like to hear all of it, as you are telling it. There isn't much more, is there?"

"No; very little."

"Well?"

"Mind you, when the fast train came to that sudden stop—so sudden that it nearly threw the passengers from their seats, the car was as quiet as a morning in May. I have not that sort of curiosity which calls people out on the tracks of a railway, at the least unusual occurrance; but this one was unusual."

"I know."

"The passageway around the stateroom to the door of the car, was right at hand. I left my seat and passed through it. A glance outside told me that I could see nothing. I returned immediately to my seat. I was not absent from it for more than a moment or two, I am quite positive. I fully expected to see Webster coming from his stateroom when I returned, and the fact that I did not so see him, made me grasp the handle of the door at once. But even then it did not occur to me that anything had happened to him."

"No?"

"No. I had given up the idea that our Cartouche would attempt a third robbery on that train. We were nearing New York."

"Yes."

"You remember what the methods of the previous robberies were?"

"Certainly."

"Both times before, although at different stations, the thief did his work just before the moment when the train would run in at a station. On both occasions, having secured the cash, and still threatening Webster with the vitriol, the thief backed out of the stateroom door exactly at the instant when the train came to a stop; she locked the door after her, from the outside, stepped off the train and disappeared. We had passed the last point on the route where a repetition of that plan would be possible."

"Yes."

"So, perceiving that Webster had not come out of his stateroom to discover the reason for the sudden stop, I determined to make myself known to him at once. So I tried the door. It was locked, as I have said, and when we opened it, we discovered that Webster had been drugged; that he was unconscious."

"And you realized what had happened."

"Naturally. Nor did I wait to see more. I understood instantly what the stop had been for. I leaped at the conclusion that the train had been flagged by confederates of the robber. I did not know whether the thief had left the train or not, when it came to a stop, although the presumption was that he had done so. I still regarded the thief as a man."

"Yes."

"But I know that whether Cartouche had left the train or not, there would have been some one there to flag the train, at least, and that I would discover the trail there, much more easily than on the train itself."

"Assuredly."

"The train conductor was there; he fortunately appeared at just the psycological moment. The train had started on again, but I determined to leave it at all hazards. I took hold of the conductor, and forced him backward through the passage, toward the car door, explaining to him the while, what I wished to do; and I pulled the signal cord when I got to where I could reach it. You know the rest."

"Not all of it. Go on."

"I found that at least three persons had been there, along that track. I traced them to a farmhouse not far away. They had talked between themselves in the Spanish language, in the presence of the farmer. He remembered certain words they had used—that is, the mere sound of the words. I secured enough information from the farmer to lead me back to New York, and to tell me that those people had planned, already, to leave New York yesterday by steamship. I found out exactly how many there were in the party. At the steamship, yesterday, the same number of persons were arrested."

"And yet, the very person most wanted, was not among them."

"So it seems, now. But you must remember that I had never seen the person we call Cartouche, and whom we have decided is a woman."

"I do remember it."

"I had two descriptions of her; one as a young man, rather handsome; the other, as an old woman. I arrested the bunch at the steamer, and one of them admitted to the name of Rubio, which was the name by which the leader of the gang had been mentioned, among the persons themselves, at the farmhouse."

"Oh, your part of it is all right. I am not criticizing that, Nick."

"No; but I am explaining, to myself possibly, just how the thing might have happened as it did."

"I know."

"Now, my idea is—the idea to which we referred a moment ago—that we did not give this Cartouche credit enough, for her shrewdness. Instead of leaving the train, after the robbery was committed, and when it was flagged, she happened to come out of the stateroom at that very moment when I had stepped to

the car platform to see what was the matter; and that was one of the accidents which could not have been foreseen."

"No."

"Had I remained in my seat, instead of leaving it, I would have seen her leaving the stateroom, and would have caught her."

"And might have had your eyes burned out with vitriol, in doing so."

"That is possible, of course, but not probable. Anyway, it didn't happen."

"No."

"The point is, that in leaving the stateroom, she saw that she was not particularly noticed by the passengers in the car. On the instant, we will say that she determined not to leave the train—and so, instead, she returned to the seat in another car which doubtless she had formerly occupied."

"It was a risk."

"Yes; but not so great as it now seems. There was another stop before the end of the route. She could have left the train there; but—don't you see?—when I pulled the cord, and the train came to a stop the second time, not far from where it had stopped the first time, she knew that somebody had got off the train to go back along the tracks, and to find the trail that was left by her confederates, if that were possible."

"That is plain enough."

"And so, later, when the time came to take the steamship out of this port, she said to herself that it was an unnecessary risk for her to go with the rest of the party; and also that it would lessen the risk to her, if another person did go in her place—provided that the person who did leave the train when it stopped the second time, had found a clew to follow. That looks to me like an explanation of the whole thing."

"Without doubt."

"If Cartouche was really on that steamer, which I now doubt, she went aboard of it much earlier in the day, and remained hidden. But, more likely than that, she is even now in New York, equally well hidden, waiting to see what will happen when it is discovered that she is not among the prisoners—if it is discovered."

"You mean——"

"Webster is the only person at all capable of identifying her. He has seen her now, exactly three times. The first time she appeared as a handsome young man; the second time she appeared as a very old lady; the third time—this time—she appeared as a beautiful young woman. She might, with some reason, suppose that even Webster would have a hard job of it to identify her."

"Sure thing."

"We have assumed that she is really a woman; probably a young woman, because while it is always possible for a beautiful young woman to impersonate a dashing young man, it is next to impossible for any man to impersonate a beautiful young woman."

"You bet."

"Well, that is the case, as I saw it. Now, Cartouche had her luck with her on that trip. Has that occurred to you?"

"Certainly."

"Of course the place for the flagging of the train by her confederates, had to be arranged upon beforehand."

"Certainly."

"That meant—the location of it meant—that Cartouche must enter the stateroom of the car where Webster was, at Philadelphia, or very soon after the train pulled out of the station at Philadelphia. Now, she had been riding in another car. She had not had one glance at Webster during the entire trip from Washington. She had kept to her own car. No woman that answers to the description of her, given me by Webster since the robbery, appeared in the car I was in after we left Washington. If there had, I would have seen her."

"Certainly."

"At Philadelphia the time was getting short for her to operate. She knew that the train would stop there six minutes, if on time. She had the distinct advantage of knowing Webster by sight, while he would not recognize her at all, as a beautiful young woman."

"Not likely."

"Suppose she was in the third car ahead of ours—she would be likely, at Philadelphia, to step from the train to the platform, and to walk slowly along it. She would have seen Webster outside; and she would have told herself that that was the time for her to enter the stateroom; while he was absent from it. She could enter it, and wait for him to return, and she could rob him at her leisure, then stupefy him with chloroform, and after it was done, wait where she was, calmly, until the train was flagged by her confederates. In the confusion of stopping she counted upon leaving the train, if it were necessary—or upon return-

ing to her seat in the other car, if that were advisable.

"As it happened, I stepped out of the train, too, so I did not see her enter the stateroom; there was her luck. As it happened, I was absent from my watch at the door of the stateroom, at the very moment when she left it; there was her luck again. That is the entire story.

"But, after the train was flagged, it had not gone far before it was stopped a second time. Her shrewdness told her that somebody had stopped the train to get off in order to pick up whatever trail might be left by those who had flagged the train. And there you are."

"Very plainly."

"And so, when it came time to leave the country yesterday, with her party, she kept herself out of it, and flocked by herself, so to speak. Possibly she has a maid, who made up the requisite number of the party to sail. Possibly, if she had tried to sail with that party, it would have numbered one more than the original bunch. At all events, everything seemed to play directly into her hands."

"It certainly did."

"And the point is that now Cartouche is at liberty in New York."

"If she has not already made her escape from New York—yes."

"We have got to take that chance, of course."

CHAPTER III.

NICK CARTER'S MILLIONAIRE CLIENT.

Joseph was summoned, and told to bring Webster to the study, and that giant of a multimillionaire who had begun life as a newsboy in New York, had gone West and become a cow-puncher, an owner of cattle of his own, and finally a cattle king and mine owner of vast wealth, dodged as he passed through the doorway, fearing that the casing would hit his head.

"Well, I'm glad that yeh remembered that I'm alive," was his greeting, after he had shaken hands with the detective. "I've been coolin' my heels down in that li'br'y uh yourn, Sid, till I sure begun teh think yeh'd plumb forgot old Santiago. Nice little mess this affair has turned out teh be, hey?"

"It is not one that cannot be remedied," said the detective; "and by the way, Mr. Webster, my name is Nick Carter, you know, and not Sid Bickford."

"Oh, I know, all right; but the Sid comes handiest. That's the first name I called you by, an' things like that stick with me. Yeh'll probably be Sid to me, all the rest uh yehr life."

"Anything you like, Webster."

"Uh-huh. Now, what are yeh goin' teh do about the robber. Hey?"

"What do you want to do, Webster?"

"I want yeh teh ketch her, that's what."

"Just why do you want her caught? Is it because she has robbed you successfully, three times, and taken away more than half a million dollars from you, in cold cash? Or——"

"Uh-huh; it's partly that; also it's partly pride."

"Pride?"

"Yep. Pride. Jest plain, downright pride. Look here, Sid, I felt bad enough when I was held up the first time in that train, and relieved of the dough by a little feller with a holler cane that shot hell-fire at me, and burned worse'n that could."

"I suppose so."

"And I felt worse when he tried it the second time, as an old woman, and got away with the goods—me, who ain't never been held up before in my life. But, yeh see, even then, I knew or supposed I knew, that the robber was a man."

"And now——"

"Now—well, I feel like a silver three-cent piece that has been left on the railway track while the overland freight passed over it. I'm jest that flat. It didn't elevate me none, in my own estimation, to be held up by a little runt, like that chap appeared to be, the first time, but now, teh find out that all the while it was a woman——"

He stopped and grinned at the detective, and then went on.

"And an angel, at that; and she is an angel, too; the prettiest little angel yeh ever sot yehr eyes onto."

"Angels do not, as a rule, carry sticks around with them that are loaded with hell-fire," remarked the commissioner, with a smile.

"This one did, Billy, and don't yeh forgit it. She was an angel, too, all right—for fair; and she did have the hell-fire with her, as these two hands can testify. See them little white scars? That is what she done, to convince me. She didn't hurt me none—that is, not so very much, but as you two are settin' there, I'll carry them little mementoes around with me as long as I live, won't I?"

"I think you will."

Webster turned again to the detective.

"Do yeh think yeh can find her?" he demanded.

"I don't know. I can try, Webster; only there must be a condition."

"Sure; any condition yeh want to name, Sid."

"If I search for her and find her, you've got to prosecute her when she is found."

"Say, mebbe yeh think I don't wanta prosecute her; is that the idee?"

"Yes. Judging from what you said yesterday, and what you have said now, I had nearly arrived at the opinion that you'd prefer to marry her."

"Marry her? Well, I hadn't thought uh that, Sid; but between you an' me, she'd be a peach of a wife to take out with yeh, and teh show around."

"I suppose so—even if she is a thief; eh?"

"Say, that's a kinda tough word to apply to her, but it's true, I suppose, all the same. Oh, I ain't thinkin' uh marryin' her, Sid. Don't get any such idee as that into that head uh yourn. Nope. I want yeh teh ketch her for me."

"What for?"

"Teh do what yeh said; prosecute her, of course."

"And send her to prison?"

"Well, I suppose so—or to make her mend her ways. Mebbe that 'ud be possible."

"I'm not doing missionary work, Webster."

"Yeh'r doin' most any kind uh work, ain't yeh, if it's in yehr line, and honest and honorable, and yeh git well paid for it?"

"Why, yes, if it comes up to all those standards."

"Well, you find the gal for me; that's all."

"And you agree to make the proper charge against her when she is found, and to appear against her as a witness, to identify her, and to take oath she robbed you, after making a threat of violence, and perhaps death, against you, if you did not shell out?"

"Uh-huh, all that."

"Do you expect that you will get your money back, Webster?"

"No; I don't; and I don't care a hang about it, either. It's gone; let it go. I'm here and plumb willing to spend jest as much more, to ketch the gal. That's all there is about it."

"Perhaps you only want to see her again," suggested the detective, with another smile.

"That's it. I do wanta see her again, and that's no lie; I wanta talk to her, too. I wanta lay the law down to her, right smart, I do."

"You would never have got yourself into this affair, Webster, if it were not for that strange habit of yours of carrying so much money around with you, on your person."

"Look here, Sid, I ain't goin' teh stop none uh my habits, because of any da—rned woman that thinks she can hold me up and take it away from me whenever she wants it. I can spare what I lost, and not miss it, if anybody should ride in on a hawss an' ask yeh."

"I don't doubt that."

"I ain't never counted up what I've got, Sid, but I reckon it would foot up to the tune of thirty 'r forty millions; mebbe more. I ain't cryin' over what she's took."

"No."

"And I'm willing—perfectly willing—to spend all that you ask me teh spend, to ketch that gal. Will yeh ketch her for me?"

"I will, if she can be caught."

"Now yehr talkin' sense; but I've got jest one little qualification—if that's what yeh call it—what I wanta put in right here, as a sort uh stipulation. Them big words go, too."

"Well, what is the stipulation, Webster?"

"I want yeh teh let me help yeh ketch her."

"Eh? What do you mean by that, Webster?"

"Jest what I say."

"I'm afraid that you would be more in the way, than anything else. It isn't in your line, is it, to do detective work, Webster?"

"Mebbe it is, and again, mebbe it ain't. I ain't sayin' as teh that; all the same I wanta help. It was that thing that made Billy bring me here with him teh see you. He allowed that yeh wouldn't hear uh such a thing."

"Oh, I guess we can arrange that part of it—if you will agree to do exactly as I say."

"If yeh don't send me off on a blind trail, jest teh git rid uh me, I will."

"I won't do that."

"Then it's agreed?"

"To a certain extent, yes."

"All right, let her go at that. I ain't such a howlin' chump, mebbe, as yeh think I am. I was sheriff uh the county once; I've trailed hawss thieves, and strung 'em up afterward, in my time."

"I'm afraid that I will have to make one request of you that you may not like," said the detective.

"What is that, Sid?"

"I shouldn't care to have you carry so much money about with you, as is your habit."

"All right. I'll carry less."

"How much have you got in your pockets now?"

"About three hundred thousand, I reckon. I feel flat broke if I go out with less'n a hundred thousand; but suppose I reduce it to fifty, or even twenty-five; that'll be all right, won't it?"

"Fifty dollars—yes."

"Say, look here, Sid, yeh don't know me yet. I'd wither up an' blow away if I didn't have any more'n that in my jeans. When I was a kid, knockin' around these streets uh New York, fifty cents was a fortune teh me then; and a million ain't so much teh me now, as that was. But times has changed."

"I suppose they have. I don't object to your carrying all the money you want to, only in so far as it will put you in danger. There isn't a crook in New York, or in the whole country who doesn't know that you are a walking gold mine, and as long as you keep in the perfectly respectable part of town, that is all right. You are a pretty big man for anybody to tackle on the street, and you don't visit resorts where you would be in danger. You are not that kind of a man."

"Betcher life I ain't."

"But, if you are going to assist me in this affair, you may have to visit places where, if you are recognized and known, and it is remembered that you carry two or three fortunes in your pockets, your life wouldn't be worth a snap of your fingers."

"Rats, Sid; rats! Come off the perch. There ain't a dozen men in this town that I couldn't lick all at once, with one hand tied behind me, at that. Billy'll tel yeh that."

"You have never tackled Nick Carter yet," said the commissioner, with a smile.

"Huh; mebbe not; but Nick Carter, leastwise, Sid, here, ain't going to rob me; 'r try teh."

"We will pass the point for the present," said the detective. "Let us get down to business, now."

"I'm ready, Sid."

"You have already told me something that I wish to hear over again, explicitly; and our friend here, would like to hear it, also."

"What is it, Sid?"

"I want you to describe to us, now, exactly how that last robbery happened, after you opened the door of your stateroom on the Pullman car, when you returned to it from the platform of the station at Philadelphia."

"That is dead easy."

"I shall probably interrupt you with questions, while you tell it."

"As many as yeh like."

"Well, then, begin at the time you opened the door and stepped into the room, when you returned from your walk on the platform," said the detective.

CHAPTER IV.

THE GREEN SCARAB.

"Well," said Webster, "yeh remember our agreement, uh course."

"Yes; perfectly well."

"You'd been with me a week, as Sid Bickford. We'd gone teh Washington together, and it was understood that we were to return here, to New York, on the train I had always took, and on which I had been twice robbed, the idee being——"

"Why go into all that, Webster?"

"'Cause I wanta git it straight in my own mind, if you don't in yourn."

"All right. Go ahead in your own way."

"Sid Bickford—that was you—disappeared while we were in the station at Washington. But he came back again, presently, and I'll swear that I thought it was you, though now I krow it wasn't. It was your assistant; eh?"

"Yes."

"Nick Carter—that was you, too—got on the train with me; at least, that was the understandin', although I wasn't any the wiser, for I didn't see him do it, and I did see Sid go away when the train started.

"Well, I set in my room on the Pullman, an' gotta thinkin' it over; and I looked the men in the car over two or three times, and jest natcherly come teh the conclusion that yeh'd got left."

"Oh, never mind all that. Come down to the actual robbery."

"All right. When I went back teh the room at Philadelphia—names musta been plumb scarce when they roped one for that town, Sid—the door was shut, and I thought I had left it open. Anyhow, I went right inside, and shut it after me; and it wasn't till I did shut it that I saw the prettiest little female woman I ever did see, a-settin' right there by the window, with her back kinda toward the door, so's she wouldn't be seen, mebbe; and I plumb forgot all about the robbery we was expectin'. See?"

"Yes."

"'Hello,' says I. 'What you doin' here?' 'I'm makin' a call,' says she. 'You're welcome,' I says, and I grabbed off my Stetson and bowed to her; and by that time I had stepped way into the room, and sorta around her, so's I could see her better; and, say, Sid, when she looked up at me an' smiled, showin' her white teeth an' flashin' her pretty eyes, I was plumb locoed."

"I haven't a doubt of it. You must have been, according to what happened."

"You'd have been, too; anybody would have been, who's got eyes for a pretty face."

"Well?"

"That smile uh hers got me. I sat down and faced her—and say, when I done that, she up an' poked that stick at me—and you can better believe that I knew what that meant.

"'It's loaded,' she says, still smiling at me; but by that time there was a sorta glint in her eyes that I'd learned teh know when I saw it. Up ter then I'd thought that the feller that had done the robbing before, had sent his sweetheart in his place, jest for variety; but when I saw that there glint I spoke up, I knew that she wasn't no blooming stranger. 'Hands up,' says she; and there wasn't any perceptible pause—not so's yeh could notice it, between that remark and the first one.

"'They're up,' says I; 'and if you'll let me take 'em down, and give yeh a hug and a kiss, right on them pretty lips, I'll let yeh rob me of all I've got, and thank yeh, to boot.'

"Say, she scowled at that, and she didn't look half so pretty when she scowled. Her eyes were like the point of a pin. She didn't like what I said, a little bit."

"You can't blame her for that. What did she do then?"

"She fetched up a bottle from the seat beside her, where I hadn't seen it. At first off I sure thought she was going teh offer me a drink, only she wasn't smilin' any more. Then she reached out the point of that little cane uh hers, and rested it plumb against my forehead, right between my eyes, and she says, says she:

"'Mr. Santiago Webster,' says she, 'if you so much as move a little finger uh one uh your hands, or try not teh do what I tell yeh teh do, I'll press the button uh this here cane, and yehr lights'll go out so plumb quick that yeh won't know what's hit yeh'—or words teh that effect; understand?"

"I understand."

"Then she uncorked the bottle with her teeth, and stuck it under my nose with the other hand.

"'Smell,' say she. 'Breathe deeply, and inhale the stuff; if yeh don't, I'll burn yeh.'

"I knowed she would, too; so I smelled; and I kept on smellin' till I got dizzy; and then she dropped the can and took hold of me. I tried to get hold uh her—I'd sure hugged her some, even then, if I had; but I was that far gone that I jest couldn't. And that's all. I don't remember no more about it. You know the rest better'n I do."

"Do you suppose that you could forget your admiration for her long enough to give me a fairly good description of how she looked?" the detective asked.

"Mebbe. I'll try."

"I wish you would, Webster. Cut out the admiration, and tell me exactly how she looked, and if there was any distinguishing mark about her—in her face, her eyes, on her hands, or anything about her, different from others, that you especially noticed."

"Well, lemme see. She'd weigh, I suppose, about a hundred and forty, or thereabouts. She wasn't tall, an' she wasn't short, either; she was jest about right; about what yeh'd say was medium height. Her hair wasn't exactly black, but it was so plumb near it that yeh'd say it was black, for a bet; and there was a heap of it, too. It wasn't done up like most uh the women have theirs, either, all in puffs an' things like that; it was real ladylike, her hair was—and beautiful, if anybody should fall off'n the Flatiron building and ask yeh. Her eyes was like a red doe's, big, and round, and so brown they was almost black; and there was long lashes shadin' 'em—well, nobody can tell you jest what they was like; I reckon yeh'd have teh see 'em, teh understand that.

"And her teeth—they was jest as white and even as you'd think they ought teh be, set in a picture like that. Aw, say, Sid, I ain't no novelist. Yeh've gotta guess at the rest. I ain't up teh it."

"Was there any jewelry? Did she wear rings, or a brooch, or anything of the sort in her hair?"

"No rings; not one. A small pin, I think it was, at her throat. It looked like a bug, or a small beetle, and it was green, and it was mounted in that old kind uh red gold that used teh be found in California. There ain't none like it found nowadays; it's all yaller gold now."

"The pin was a scarab, doubtless."

"Eh? Mebbe so. I don't know what a scarab is, only I don't like the sound of it."

"Anything else?"

Webster stuck out his right hand, the back of it uppermost, and pointed to a white scar upon it, the size of a dried pea.

"See that scar?" he asked.

"Yes."

"She gave that one to me, the first time I ever saw her, when I thought she was a young dude. That was the time that she convinced me that I'd better keep still."

"Yes."

"Well, she's got one exactly like it, in the same place, on the same hand—precisely between the second and the third knuckles; only yeh can't see it so plain on her hand, because the hand itself is almost as white as the scar; but it's there all the same. I reckon mebbe she has burned herself, sometime or other, foolin' with that hell-fire ur her'n."

"Perhaps so. Anything else, in the way of a mark?"

"Nope; not so's you could notice it."

"Any gold in her teeth?"

"I didn't see any."

"Now, about that scarab; how large was it, and how——"

"Say, Sid."

"Well?"

"If yehr thinkin' to find her by that, yeh won't."

"Why not?"

"Because she ain't got it no more."

"Hasn't got it? What do you mean by——"

"I've got it—that thing yeh call a scarab. The pin's gone off it now, but I've got it, jest the same. I dunno whether she left it with me on purpose, or whether she jest dropped it; but I'm inclined teh think that she lost it—and mebbe she don't know where she did lose it, either."

"Have you got it with you?"

"Surest thing yer know, Sid."

"Let me see it; but first, tell me where you found it, and when?"

Webster dived into a pocket and brought out one of his many wallets which he held in his hand while he continued to speak.

"The interesting part of it is that I didn't find the thing till this morning, Sid," he said slowly. "I don't carry anything but a pencil and a fountain pen in this here vest pocket, but this morning when I was dressing, I felt a lump there, and I poked my fingers down inside, to see what made it. I fished out this here what ye call it thing. Here it is. Now, say, do yeh suppose that she put it there? or did it jest natcherly drop off'n her, at the time she was leanin' over me, goin' through me? The pin is broke off, yeh see, and that would suggest that she dropped it, without knowing it, and didn't miss it till afterward. What do you think about it?"

"That would be the natural conclusion about it, Webster."

"What do you think about it, Billy?" Webster asked, turning to their friend.

"I should be of the opinion that has been expressed by Nick," was the reply.

"Well, I don't agree with either of yeh. What I think about it, is this: The thing got broke off, an' fell teh the floor, while she was fussin' over me, feelin' into my pockets, an otherwise collectin' her toll. I think she picked it up, and then looked at me, and that mebbe she thought I looked sorta pathetic, settin' there, a great strong man, helpless in her dainty little hands, and she said to herself that the little bug would be only a poor return for what she had taken away from me, but sech as it was—and so on; yeh see?"

Both detectives were smiling; both nodded.

"Well," said Webster, "there it is, anyhow. Yeh can look at it, but yeh can't have it. I want it for a keepsake."

The detective was examining it closely.

"Perhaps you will lend it to me, Webster," he said presently.

"Mebbeso. What for?"

"I want to have a pin put on it, and wear it, for a while."

"What for?"

"Because I think she lost it, without knowing that she had lost it till much later. Because, more than likely, she has not told her friends, now under arrest, that she had lost it for she hasn't had much chance to do so; and principally because I think the pin is an emblem."

"An emblem of what?"

"I wouldn't be surprised, William," said the detective, turning to the commissioner, "if this scarab, worn as an ornament, may have some relation to the organization which you suspect to exist, and of which you think our Cartouche is the head and chief. And if that is so, it may prove to be a valuable discovery. What do you think?"

"It is possible," was the reply.

CHAPTER V.

NICK CARTER FIGURES OUT A PLOT.

"Ask Miss Jones to come to the study, Joseph," said the detective.

"Yes, sir," replied the faithful servant of Nick Carter. And departed on his errand.

It was the morning after the interview concerning Cartouche, the mysterious robber, and although the detective had not gone abroad in quest of the beautiful young woman whom he now believed to be the real Cartouche, he had spent much time in thought about the case; and particularly had he studied the scarab that had so strangely and unaccountably come into the possession of Santiago Webster.

He was holding it in his hand, then, examining it for the hundredth time, or more.

To him there was an unaccountable fascination about it, and he had realized the influence of it from the moment he had first taken it in his hand when Webster handed it to him the preceding day.

It was, unquestionably, a genuine Egyptian scarab, mounted in California gold—for any metalurgist will tell you that California gold may be identified anywhere in the world, by an expert.

Nor had this pin been mounted after the fashion of scarabs, generally.

The gold at the back was not in one solid plate, but was more like a fretwork made with tiny strips of gold, like ribbons, so that each strip passed first above, and then under the nearest cross strips.

And these had been welded together near the rim where the whole mounting was fastened to the scarab itself.

The most unusual thing about it was that two strips of gold, very narrow, completely encircled the jade, passing across the face of the oval and crossing each other at the middle of it, in front; and at the very center, where they crossed, an Arabic character had been traced with some sharp instrument.

That character represented as nearly as possible in Arabic, the English letter K, and it might or might not have a significance of its own.

At the back of the scarab, traced on the gold in a homely manner, evidently done by a novice, were the Spanish words: *En la vida, y el muerte,* which the detective had translated freely to mean "In life, and death."

He was still engaged in examining the scarab when Ida Jones, his young woman assistant in his work, entered the room and seated herself opposite him.

"I think I have work for you, Ida," he told her.

"I shall be glad of that," she replied.

He passed the scarab over the table toward her.

"Take a look at that, and tell me what you think of it," he said.

"One would scarcely call it pretty," she said, after a moment; "but it is interesting. A genuine scarab, is it not?"

"Yes. Those are Spanish words, at the back, meaning 'In life, and death.' The Arabic character at the intersection of the two gold bands, at the front, may mean anything at all. Do you know anything about the last case I had, Ida?"

"The Pullman car robbery? No. Nothing."

"We named the robber Cartouche, for want of a better name; and, also because one of my friends, down at headquarters, has insisted all along that the person so named has been—or is now attempting to do so—imitating the great Cartouche."

"But I thought you had caught him, chief."

"I supposed I had captured *her;* yes; but it appears that I was mistaken."

"Her, did you say?"

"Yes. Our modern Cartouche has turned out to be a woman; not only that, but a young woman of surprising beauty and talents—a surprising creature altogether. Anyway, that is why I have called you to the study; because Cartouche is a woman."

"You wish me to go out after her?"

"I don't know. I want to hear what you think about it."

"What sort of a woman is she, if you know anything about her?"

"We know very little about her, Ida, save she is beautiful, and brave; I think that the term may apply to a thief, don't you?"

"Yes."

"She is also an adept at disguising herself. Santiago Webster has been her particular prey—the only prey of hers, or of her gang, if she has one, that we know about. The only description we have of her, was obtained from him, and it is not sufficient. Some other means than that must be used to get trace of her."

"She is still in the city, you think?"

"I am reasonably certain of it, although there is every possibility of an error, even in that, where one is so shrewd as she has proven herself to be."

Ida Jones nodded, and remained silent.

"Briefly," said the detective, "the circumstance is this: I supposed I had the entire lot of them, six in

all, at the steamship by which they were leaving the country. At police headquarters, later, it developed that the one we most wanted was missing. She had not been at the ship at all. Now, another ship sailed from another pier, at the same hour, and she may have taken passage on that one."

"There is the wireless," suggested Ida.

"We have used it. There is no trace of the young woman, on that ship; that is, no trace of her that can be discovered; none that even suggests her personality; but, as I have said, she is an adept at disguises, and she may be there."

"The steerage? The second cabin?" Ida suggested again.

"Everything aboard that ship has been inquired into," replied the detective. "Every person aboard of it who might by any possibility be our Cartouche in disguise, has been gone over with a fine-toothed comb. Nothing has resulted. Personally I believe that she is not there."

"That ship sailed the day before yesterday?"

"Yes."

"There were two or three or more, yesterday."

"Cartouche could not have left the city by such a route, since the day before yesterday, in any disguise. My friend at headquarters has seen to that. He was warned of the disappearance before I was."

"Then, in your opinion, the woman is still here, in the city?"

"That is my belief."

"What has this scarab to do with it?"

"I am coming to that, Ida. When she robbed Webster the last time, she wore that scarab, and in going through him, after she had chloroformed him, she either dropped it, and so, lost it—or she purposely put it into one of his pockets. He holds to the latter belief."

"And you? What do you think about it, chief?"

"I am inclined to Webster's view of the case, although I have not admitted it to him. He is quite enthralled with the woman as it is, and if he really supposed that she purposely gave him this scarab there would be no holding him, I'm afraid."

"Enthralled with her? Just what do you mean by that, please?"

"Webster is fifty-five and looks fifteen years younger than that. He is a strikingly handsome fellow, of the giant sort; a hercules. He is susceptible, and at the same time he is attractive to women. He is a widower, and has been one for many years. This Cartouche is, as I have said, exceedingly beautiful; but she possesses one quality which would attract Webster even more than her beauty."

"And that is—what?"

"She has pluck. She is brave. Dozens of men have tried to kill Webster, in the past, and have been planted rather deeply, themselves. Hundreds have tried to hold him up and rob him at different times, because it is known that he always carries a fortune around with him in his pockets, and this young woman is the only person who ever succeeded in getting the best of him."

"Well, you were going to add more to that statement, weren't you?"

"Yes. Webster is more than half in love with her, right now, I firmly believe."

"And—— That isn't all you were going to say, is it?"

"No; and I believe that she has adopted this method—not in the beginning, but at the last of it—for the very purpose of fascinating him."

"It is rather a strange way, isn't it, to make a man in love with one—to rob him?"

"Not if the one is a beautiful woman, and the man is Webster."

"He has seen her three times, hasn't he?"

"He has seen her only once—as she is; that is, as she probably is."

"How is that?"

"The first time, she was a young man, carrying a cane. The second time, she was an old woman with a parasol. The third time she was herself. Now, I read the three occasions on which Webster has been robbed by her, as follows: She robbed him the first time because the knowledge had reached her that he always carried a fortune with him, and she thought he would prove an easy victim under her original methods—which he did."

"Well?"

"She robbed him the second time because she wanted more of his money; because she had discovered that he had never told of the robbery, and that therefore she could work out her methods again, as easily as she succeeded in doing the first time; and—please observe the and—she was interested to see again a man who could lose two hundred and fifty thousand dollars in cash without ever mentioning the fact to a soul."

"I don't think I quite follow you."

"You will, presently."

"Well?"

"She got one hundred and fifty thousand the second time, and still he did not squeal. As far as she was able to determine, he never told any one about that robbery, either. He was a new sort of a creature to her; she had never heard of his like before. He had interested her beyond the mere fact that he was a fruitful victim."

"Do you mean that she became interested in the man himself?"

"That is the way it looks to me."

"And so undertook the same thing a third time?"

"Yes; when she was convinced that he had said nothing about the other two occasions. As a matter of fact, he had informed only two persons, my friend at headquarters and me. But she did not know that—nor did she suspect it, I am convinced, until the train stopped a second time after the robbery. She remained on the train after the third robbery, you know, and she would not have done that had she not been reasonably certain that Webster had not told. When the train stopped a second time, and she knew that he had told, and that there had doubtless been a detective on the train all the time, it was too late for her to get away, and so she saw it—and probably she had seen enough of Webster, already, to feel that he would not expose her, even if he should walk through the train, and recognize her, after he had recovered from the effects of the chloroform."

"Chief, will you please tell me just what you mean by all this?" Ida asked, knitting her brows in perplexity.

"Yes. It is rather remarkable that I should think it, but I do, after deep thought on the subject. I think that Madam Cartouche means to stay in this country, and to marry Santiago Webster's millions, if it is possible to do so. It is a much better game, and more interesting than the one she has been playing, Ida."

CHAPTER VI.

WEBSTERR AND HIS MILLIONS.

For a moment Ida Jones stared at her chief, a half smile upon her face as she did so; and then she uttered just one word in comment.

"Impossible," she said.

"Why so, Ida?"

"Well, perhaps preposterous would be a better word; but to me the most preposterous thing of all—you will pardon me, I know—is that you should think of such an idea."

"Shall I tell you just how I arrived at that conclusion?" the detective asked her.

"Please do."

"The grouping together of several items in this affair, has brought me to that conclusion. I will tab them off on my fingers as I proceed."

"Very well."

"First, then, that she should venture upon a third attempt at robbery, at all; and that the third attempt should happen in the same place, at the same time and almost under the identical conditions."

"All that could be accounted for by the fact that Webster had not squealed, as you just now expressed it," said Ida; but Nick did not reply to that.

"Second," he said, "that in committing the third robbery, she should elect to appear before her victim in her own proper person, undisguised."

"How do you know that she did that? How do you know that she was not disguised?"

"Everything about her costume at the time, and about her face and her hair, and all that was simple in the extreme, according to Webster's description; as if she had intended, deliberately intended, that he should know that she was not disguised."

"Oh, well, I don't think that that counts for very much, either; and with me, it would argue the other way. If she intended to marry him, later on, she would not wish that he should recognize her then, as the woman who had robbed him."

"Why not? You forget that your standards and hers are totally different; and that the man has still different ones. She is doubtless a reader of character. She has read him, and the fact that she has already interested him almost to the point of confession on his part, is sufficient proof that she has read him correctly."

Well, we will pass that, then."

"Third—please examine that little ornament."

"I have done so already."

"Have you determined what happened to the pin? Let me explain before you reply. When Webster described the young woman to me, he included that pin in the description, because I asked if she wore any jewelry. Apparently that was the only thing of the sort that she did wear at the time. It was at her throat. There was no struggle in the room where the robbery was committed, and no semblance of one. Now, look at the place where the pin has been broken off and tell me what you think about it."

"I see what you mean—that the pin was wrenched off abruptly, and was not broken off by accident."

"Exactly; and it was not done with the fingers, either. Don't you see where there is a scratch against the gold, near the shank of the pin, or where the pin would be if it were there; and that the hinge on which the pin lifted, has been bruised and pinched together?"

"Could that have been done while the pin was at her throat, and if there was no sort of struggle to account for it?"

"It might have been done before, and hung, half broken, till then."

"No; a woman like that would have had it mended in such a case, before she wore it again, particularly if she were going upon an expedition of the kind that took her aboard of that train, where a lost pin of that sort might furnish a clew to her discovery."

"Perhaps you are right about that, chief."

"Certainly I am right about it. Again, if you will notice where the pin has been wrenched away from the ornament, you will see that the marks of nippers upon the hinge, are clean and new."

"Well?"

"So, it appears to me that she purposely wrenched the pin from the ornament, so that it would appear as if it had been broken and lost, although she deliberately put it into one of the pockets of Webster's waistcoat, afterward."

"But why, if she wished to present him with the pin, should she have taken the trouble to break it? It seems to me that the logical way would have been to pin the ornament upon one of her calling cards, and to have written upon it, something like this: 'Left with my friend, Mr. Webster, as a memento of this very pleasant call upon him;' or words to that effect."

"You are pleased to be facetious, Ida."

"The thing strikes me as ludicrous. Why should she want him to have the ornament at all, if he was not to suppose that she had left it there purposely?"

"Why, indeed? If you can answer that question correctly, we will have no difficulty in finding the young woman."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Merely that the ornament has a distinct agency of its own to perform."

"I confess that I do not follow you at all, chief."

"Do you remember reading in books about the old days of signet rings, when a king gave his messenger a ring, instead of his signature, and it was all powerful?"

"Yes."

"The possession of such a signet ring by any person, no matter how humble in life, supplied the password to all things, and gave to the person who chanced to wear it, royal authority."

"Yes."

"Now, if this ornament should happen to be something of the same nature, what then? If my friend at headquarters is correct in his estimate that this woman is at the head of a great organization of criminals, and the ornament is a talisman among them, what then? If Madam Cartouche, as we must call her, tore the pin away from the ornament, believing that Webster would have it made into a scarf pin, and wear it, what then? The answer to every one of those questions is the same."

"What is it?"

"That, if she wished him to wear it at all, it was intended as some sort of a message, concerning him, among her associates. Most likely one of protection."

"But, in that case, why not have told him so, in a few written words?"

"Webster was unconscious at the time she left him; he was unconscious when I found him. Other eyes than his would have seen and read such a note, and its significance would have been destroyed. Besides, she probably wished him to remain unconscious of the effect of the scarab, and of its purposes."

"All this brings us back again to your amazing suggestion that the woman intends to marry the man, if she can. I still think it preposterous."

"It may be entirely so. I do not deny that. But beautiful women realize their power, my friend, some of them very thoroughly. Cartouche would never have appeared before Webster, as she did appear at that time, unless she had wished to make use of that power."

"To get to him, yes; and to keep him, for a moment, from giving the alarm."

"That was not necessary. She had her vitriol cane gun; a deadly weapon which Webster had thoroughly learned to fear. Nor would she have gone quietly back to her car, after the robbery, and taken such long chances, unless she had believed that she could influence him—and that I thoroughly believe she could have done, had he passed through that car, and encountered her."

"Well, admitting that the theory is the correct one, what is it that you wish me to do?"

"Find the woman."

"Where?"

"Somewhere here, in New York. Perhaps as a guest at one of the great hotels. She has cash enough now, to do as she pleases, as to that."

"Then at the hotel where Mr. Webster is staying?"

"As likely there, as at any other place."

"But, according to your theory, she has only to show herself to him, only to let him get one good view of her face, to have him at her feet at once. Why, then, should it be difficult to find her?"

"You forget that in doing so, she would also have to show her face to others."

"No; I do not. But others have not seen her. Webster is the only person who has seen her."

"Webster has described her, and there are people whose business it is to find other people by mere descriptions of them. Our Cartouche is shrewd. She wants to understand entirely the condition of things around her before she makes a move. She will not show her beautiful face, publicly, at one of the leading hotels—the Mammoth, for instance, where Webster stays—until she is thoroughly satisfied of what the effect will be when she does so."

"That seems logical enough, if the other part of it is also logical."

"Well, Ida, look at it from another standpoint, then."

"I am ready to look at it from any standpoint, chief, only I wish to absorb your idea, before I accept it as my own, you know; that is, if I am to do good work upon it; and you know that I always argue against you, even when I believe with you, in order to get your ideas thoroughly."

"Yes; I know."

"What is the other standpoint, then?"

"My friend at headquarters, and I, are equally convinced that Cartouche has not left town. We believe that she is here. We know that she is bountifully supplied with cash, since only a very small amount of money was found in the possession of the prisoners who were taken."

"I did not know that."

"The very safest place for her to hide, just now, is plumb in the spot light, as Webster would put it; right in the public eye. Now, Ida, if you were going to do such a thing as that, with plenty of money at your command, how would you accomplish it?"

"Oh, I don't know. I had not thought of it. If I had a beautiful face——"

"Which you are quite well aware you have got; but go on."

"And felt the necessity for hiding it for a while; of assuming a disguise, in other words; I think I would lean toward doing the aristocratic act. I'd be be a countess, or a princess, or something of that sort, traveling incog, probably; and——"

"That is sufficient. You have the idea."

"Well, what shall I do with it?"

"Become one of the things you have said, yourself. Make up in as good an imitation of Cartouche as you can, from the description that I shall give you, and with the assistance I can offer. Appear at the Mammoth, or another of the hotels, as a countess, or a princess, no matter which—and wear the scarab!"

"Wear the scarab?"

"Yes. Wear the scarab at your throat, as she wore it when Webster saw her."

"But she intended him to wear it, and she will know——"

"He shall wear one so like it that even she will not know the difference at a little distance. I am going to have two replicas of it made to-day; Webster shall wear one of them and I will retain the other. If we can manage to make you look a little like Cartouche, and if Webster should see you with the scarab—and if Cartouche should see you with Webster, and the scarab ornament, too, there will be something doing, Ida."

CHAPTER VII.

CARTOUCHE MAKES ANOTHER CALL.

As it happened, if Nick Carter wanted proof of the presence of the beautiful Cartouche in New York City, it was supplied to him that same evening.

The latter part of the day had been employed in getting Ida Jones ready for the part she was to fill in the search for the woman train robber, and we will devote just a word to that preparation before dealing with the opening paragraph of this chapter.

Nick's first employment that day, after the interview with Ida, was to visit a friend of his who could prepare the imitations of the scarab that he wanted to use. That the imitations were made of a composition of wax and other substances, made no difference, for they would pass for what he wished them to do.

Next, after Ida had completed the major parts of her costume, he assisted her in making up as he wanted her to appear.

The great drawback in this part of the preparation consisted in the fact that the detective had never seen Cartouche. Had he been able to get just one look at the face which had been described to him as being so superlatively beautiful, he would not have been at fault at all in what he wished to do, and he could have made Ida's face appear enough like that other one, for his purposes.

But he had never seen the woman robber. He had only the description, and a very meager one of her that had been supplied by Webster; and so the reader must not suppose that the detective had any idea that Ida, in her new rôle, would ever be mistaken by anybody, for the woman of the Pullman.

Not that. He merely wished her to have the appearance of a distinguished foreigner of the Spanish type; that is all. That, and the presence of the scarab —for Ida was to wear the real one—might accomplish what he hoped it would; it might induce some person who would understand and recognize the significance of the scarab to speak to her, and that was practically all that the detective hoped for so far as Ida was concerned.

When all these preparations were completed; when Ida's trunks were arranged to be sent to the hotel, and she was ready to appear there accompanied by her maid, her chaperon, and a courier, it was late afternoon.

It might be added right here that Patsy acted in the capacity of courier for Ida, who was to be known as the Countess de Trouville, because Ida liked the sound of it; that Patsy's wife Adelina took the part of maid, and that Mrs. Peters, the housekeeper, went along as chaperon; and that a splendid suite of rooms was engaged for them at the Mammoth, at which they arrived in some state, apparently from a train from the West, at half-past six o'clock in the afternoon.

Ida, of course, wore a profusion of jewels, in the character she was to represent, and among them, pinned at her throat where it was plainly to be seen, although not overconspicuous, was the green scarab.

That part of the case was merely a venture on the part of the detective.

It might, or it might not, result in anything at all: the scarab might attract the attention of some person or persons who would recognize that it possessed a significance; it might attract the attention of Cartouche herself, if she were at one of the hotels, and if it should do so, Nick firmly believed that it would be productive of some sort of information.

It was true that it might, and doubtless would, serve as a warning to Cartouche, if she should see it; but even so, it would occasion some sort of action on her part which would be likely to betray her. At least so Nick Carter hoped.

The instructions given to Ida, Patsy, and Adelina, were general in their character.

They were merely to keep their eyes open and watch out for the presence at the great hotel, of any person who might be Cartouche in disguise. And Nick selected the Mammoth for the double reason that it was most in the public eye at the time, and therefore would be the natural selection of Cartouche, and also because Webster was staying there, and where he happened to be staying, Nick believed that Cartouche would go.

At seven o'clock that evening, from his study, Nick telephoned to Webster, at the hotel; but Webster had to be "paged" before he was found in the café of the house, and called to the telephone.

"I only wanted to know if you were there, and intended to stay there this evening," said the detective over the phone. "I had decided to run in and have a chat with you, after a little."

"Come here and dine with me," said Webster in reply.

"No. I'll look in later. I only wished to be sure that you would be there," said Nick.

"I was going out, but I'll stay in if you particularly wish to see me," Webster told him. "I have two tickets for one of the theaters, and have invited a chance acquaintance here, to go with me. But——"

"All right. Go ahead. I'll see you afterward. It will be fully as well. I'll drop in at the hotel about eleven-thirty."

And so it was arranged.

It was eleven-thirty-five when the detective did go to the hotel and ask for Webster, and he was told at the desk that the cattle king had gone to his rooms, but had left word that Mr. Carter should be sent up at once when he called.

The detective knew where the room was located, of course, and he went to it at once, and alone. There was no necessity of being shown the way.

He tapped upon the door, and he heard a voice call to him from the inside to enter.

He tried the door and it refused to open when he turned the knob, so he called again; and again a voice from the inside called to him to enter.

"But the door is locked," Nick called back, in reply.

"I know it," the voice—unmistakably Webster's—shouted at him, again. "Come in."

Nick went in, then. It did not take him long to do it, either. He was instantly upon the alert, for he remembered another door that had been locked on the outside, when Webster was robbed in the stateroom of the Pullman.

He was on the point of making use of his picklock to open the door, when he discovered that the key to the door was lying upon the floor close to the wall, where it evidently had been dropped by the person who had last made use of it.

To enter the room after that discovery was the work of a moment only; and then, as soon as he had crossed the threshold, he paused in utter amazement, for he had not expected to discover anything like this.

Santiago Webster, giant in stature and strength though he was, was now helpless—and very strangely so.

He was seated upon one of the easy-chairs that formed a part of the furniture of the room—a high-backed one as it happened, which had evidently been just the thing for the purposes of the person who had fastened him there.

A wire, of that pliable variety which is commonly known as stove-pipe wire, had been drawn across his throat just below the Adam's apple, and thence around the back of the chair, where it had been fastened. It was not so tight as to create discomfort, so long as Webster did not attempt to move, but it was sufficiently tight to prevent his moving his head forward the least bit, and to prevent his making any attempt to rise.

Another wire of the same sort had been passed around each of his ankles, and thence around the legs of the chair, so that he could not move his feet.

But his arms and hands were quite free. An open box of cigars was on the table beside him, and he was even then grimly smoking one. There was also a bottle of whisky, and a pitcher of water near at hand from which he could help himself whenever he pleased.

But the point at which the wire that held his head against the back of the chair, was fastened, was entirely out of his reach, and he was as thoroughly a prisoner, and helpless, as if he had been trussed up like a mummy, and with a thousand wires.

"You seem to be enjoying yourself, at all events," said the detective, halting when he was halfway across the room from the door. "Who has been devoting so much attention to you, Webster?"

"The gal," was the laconic reply.

"Cartouche again?"

"Uh-huh; that's what yeh call her, I believe. Say, get a move on yeh, Sid, and take off this da—anged wire, will yeh?"

"Surely," was the quick reply, and he lost no time in removing the wires. "She had you tied up in good shape, didn't she?" he asked, as he performed the last act of the service.

"Betcher life, Sid. Gee; it feels good to stand up and stretch. I've been sittin' in this da—blessed chair, two hours by the clock, if anybody should light on the roof in an airship and ask yeh."

"Then you didn't go to the theater, after all?"

"No. The man I'd asked to go with me was called away and couldn't go, and so I gave the tickets teh one uh the bell hoppers. Well, I've seen her again, Sid."

"So it would appear, from the looks of things here. How much did she take away from you this time?"

"Not a cent; not a pickayune, Sid."

"What?"

"It's a fact. She didn't take a cussed thing. Said she hadn't come here this time to do that, an' when she was shy uh cash, she'd come again. I told her it would be a heap easier teh send for it."

"What did she come here for, then?"

"Jest teh have a little chat, so teh speak."

"She must find your company interesting."

"Well, she said she did. Her's is, anyhow. But, I'll tell yeh right now, Sid, I wanta ketch her worse'n ever, now."

"You do? Are you sure of that?"

"I sure am, and then some."

"I'm beginning to want to catch her, too, Webster."

"Well, Nick Carter—that's yehr name, although I like teh call yeh Sid—I'll tell yeh what I'll do. If yeh'll ketch that gal, and git her dead to rights where she can't get away, and let me tie her up for two solid hours where I can talk to her as she talked teh me, an' say jest what I wanta say without her havin' a chance teh do anything but listen, I'll pay all the expenses, no matter what they are, and I'll give yeh a cold half a million dollars to boot, for the service. And that goes."

"You are a trifle excited now, aren't you, Webster?" asked the detective, smiling.

"Excited? Well, mebbeso. Who wouldn't be? I'm plumb locoed by that gal. She's got me going, sure. I'm in a regular stampede!"

"What did she attack you again for, if she didn't want to rob you?" asked the detective.

"Yeh ask her, and mebbe she'll answer. I'm blessed if I know, unless it was teh ask about that confounded scarab thing."

"Oh, she asked about that, did she?"

"Uh-huh."

"What did she want to know about it, Webster?"

"Oh, she jest wanted teh know if I had found it. She said she had lost it, and thought she might have dropped it when she was going through my pockets in the Pullman. And then she wanted to know what I had done with it."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE WOMAN OF THE SCARAB.

"Well, what did you tell her that you had done with the scarab?" asked the detective.

"I told her that I had lent it to you."

"To me?"

"Uh-huh; to the great Nick Carter. That is precisely what I told her."

"Look here, Webster, do you mean to say that you told her—that?"

"Just that. I told her that I had engaged your services, and that I'd pay yeh a million, if necessary, to get her. I told her that I'd never let up on her as long as I lived, and had the price. Yeh see, Sid, she's a woman. I wanted teh play square with her. I wanted her teh know that I was on her track, and that sooner or later, I'd get her, too."

"You are a bigger jackass than I thought you were, Webster; and I already had rather an exalted opinion of you in that line."

"Mebbeso. It don't hurt none. I've got a sort of a notion that way myself. But all the same I won't have it done no different. I'm goin' teh git her in the open, if I git her at all, if anybody should wake up in the middle of the night an' ask yeh."

"Webster, I have a good notion to throw down the whole affair."

"Sid, yeh can do as you blamed please, as teh that. I want yeh to set in the game and see it through to a finish, if yeh will; but I reckon yeh don't have teh, if yeh don't wanta. As for me, I'm goin' teh git that woman, and I'm goin' teh let her know that it's me that gits her, too. I'm goin' teh play my first cards face up on the table; and I have done it. Oh, I'm dam—I'm mad, all right; there ain't no gittin' around that."

"Is it your idea that you are to keep her informed of everything that you do, or intend to do, to capture her, Webster?"

"Nope. I have told her all I'm going teh tell her, even if I have another chance to talk teh her, which ain't likely. And I ain't told her very much at that."

"Just what did you tell her?"

"I told her that you was on the car the last time she robbed me, and she said she knew that all the time; she even said what chair you occupied in the car, so she did know."

"Go on. What else did you tell her?"

"Nothin', only that I had engaged your services, and meant to hang on teh them teh the end uh this affair, and that you had made me swear that I'd prosecute her if you caught her."

"What did she say to that?"

"She didn't say anything at all teh that; she only jest smiled one uh her pretty and tantalizin' smiles; that's all."

"What else did she say about the scarab?"

"Nothin' much; only that she wanted it back again when I was through with it. I told her that the green scarab stood me in close teh half a million dollars, and that she could have it any day for that amount, and she said all right, that mebbe some day she'd buy it back."

"Now tell me how she got into your rooms this time."

"She just walked in, like anybody else would do it. There was a rap at the door, and I sung out, 'Come in.' I was standing over there near the window, lookin' out, and thinking it was some uh the hotel help. I didn't know any different till I looked around and saw that gun uh mine that's over there on the table at the other side uh the room, pointed at me. I don't think I'd a minded the gun, none, if it hadn't been that she had that da-arned cane uh hers in the other hand. I ain't got any use for that cane, Sid."

"I know you haven't. Well, go on. Tell me the rest."

"She ordered me teh mosey across the room teh that chair yer found me in, and teh set down on it. Then she walked around behind me and fixed that cussed wire as yeh found it; then she wanted teh know if I'd keep my feet still while she fixed them, or if I'd prefer another vitriol scar; I took the first proposition, and there I was, roped, tied, and branded. By

the great horn spoon, Sid, I'm mad clear through, this time."

"Didn't you have any money with you this time, that she did not rob you?"

"Only a little; only about thirty thousand. I suppose that wasn't worth her time; eh?"

"I think you are right about that, Webster. She is after all you've got, and she won't be satisfied till she gets it, either. How long a time was she here?"

"She left me just thirty minutes before you came in."

"So, then, she was there an hour and a half. Do you mean that?"

"Uh-huh."

"What was she doing all of that time?"

"Settin' over there where you are, smokin' cigarettes, and enjoyin' herself."

"Did she look just the same as she did the last time you saw her in the Pullman?"

"Nope. She looked a heap sight better than she did then. She was all dressed up this time—'r mebbe yeh'd call it not quite so much dressed; that is, there was less clothes about it. All in evening dress, yeh know. Low neck, yeh know, that was filled in with lace and stuff like that, and another one of them scarab things pinned teh it."

"Another one?"

"Uh-huh. I thought it was the same one at first, but she said she had a lot uh them. She told me teh wear mine when I got it back from you, and teh tell you to wear it if I didn't wanta. Say, she's a human puzzle, all right, all right."

"Otherwise than the dress she wore, did she look the same as when you saw her in the Pullman," the detective asked.

"If yeh mean, was she jest as pretty, I'll say that she was a heap sight prettier; but she hadn't changed none, as I could see. There weren't no gray hairs, nor bald spots, that I could discover, and she wasn't tremblin' none, with advancin' age, Sid."

"Did she wear a hat, when you saw her to-night?"

"Uh-huh. I asked her to take it off while she was here, so's I could see her hair, and she did. Nice of her, wasn't it?"

"Did she wear any sort of a wrap when she entered the room, or was she without one?"

"Uh-huh; she had on a sort uh wrap which she threw there, onto that couch in the corner. What are yeh askin' all them questions for?"

"I merely wanted to discover, if possible, if she was staying here at the hotel, or if she had just come in from the street when you saw her," replied the detective, as he left his chair and crossed the room toward the couch that Webster had indicated. A moment later he turned around with a rose leaf in his hand, and asked:

"Did she wear roses, Webster?"

"She wore a rose; a red one. I reckon that is a leaf that dropped off'n it, that yeh've got in yehr hand now. If yeh want teh see the rose itself, I reckon yeh'll find it in the next room where I sleep. She went in there once, teh look around a bit, she said, and she told me she left it there, on my dresser, teh remember her by. Say, she is mighty thoughtful about leavin' things teh remember her by—I don't think. That ain't all she left, either."

"What else?"

"Well, yeh couldn't see it if I was teh tell yeh about it, and I guess I won't."

"Look here, Webster, if I am going to continue in this case, you have got to tell me everything, and that's all about it."

"Well, if I was teh tell yeh about this thing, it wouldn't do yeh no sort uh good. It wasn't nothin' tangible, so teh speak, only when she was leavin' it; but it was mighty good an' plenty tangible jest then, if anybody who's been dead and buried all his life, like I have, should wake up suddenly an' ask yeh. Yeh couldn't see it, even if I was teh point out the spot where she left it. Gee, I can feel it yet, Sid, an' that's no dream."

"What was it?"

"A kiss."

"A—what?"

"Sure thing; a kiss. Oh, yeh needn't fall outa the saddle and ketch yehr spur, doin' it, Sid. She didn't leave it without bein' asked. I told her it would be a mighty small pay for what she had done teh me, and she seemed teh think so, too. Anyhow, she jest natcherly walked teh the side uh the chair and brushed her lips against mine. Say—well I ain't goin' teh say it, but if ever yeh git a rap on the block that'll knock yeh plumb silly in a holy minute, and if ever yehr tied teh a stake by a lot uh howling Indians and they build a fire around yeh teh burn yeh up then and there, you'll know jest about how I felt when she done that. I hadn't got over it when I heard you coming."

"What did she talk about while she was here, Webster?"

"Oh, about the weather; and what she would do with

all the money she had borrowed uh me, 'cos she said she was going teh give it all back again, some time. But she didn't say so very much all the time she was here, although she kept up a steady stream uh talk all the time, at that."

"What did she do?"

"She was mostly busy going through my letters and papers in that desk over that. I think she read the whole outfit, though what she could have wanted teh do that for, is more'n I can git at."

"Didn't she take anything of yours away with her, Webster?"

"Uh-huh. Jest one thing."

"What was it?"

"Well, teh tell yeh the truth, it's the very fact that she took that particular thing, that has made me so whoppin' mad at her. I'd rather she had taken all the cash I had here and some more besides, than to have swiped that ring."

"Oh; a ring, was it?"

"Yes. That little, plain, gold ring that I wore on the little finger of my left hand. It was a keepsake, Sid, and it ain't worth more'n a few dollars; but I have worn it a good while, and I didn't want teh part with it. All the same she spied it, and asked what it was; and I, never supposin' that she'd care for a little thing like that, told her. Then she says, 'Take it off and let me see it,' she says; and like a fool I done it. And then, she slips it onto her own finger, and she says, real childlike an' bland:

"'It fits my third finger jest like a weddin' ring. I reckon I'll wear it;' and she wouldn't give it back, either."

"Did she take away any of your letters, or papers?"

"I didn't see that she did; I couldn't see her at the desk, from where I was."

"What reason did she give you, for coming here at all, to-night, Webster?"

"Jest the one I told yeh; nothin' else. She said she wanted to see me and have a chat with me; and that she wanted me teh see her, and have a chat with her; and that she didn't come here teh steal anything, and she wasn't going teh, either; and because she had me all roped and tied so's I couldn't move, I told her a few things, too; you bet."

"What about?"

"Oh, I had a chance teh say things, and I said 'em, if anybody should whisper in yehr ear an' ask yeh. I made her blush, and I made her ears burn, and her nose go inteh the air, and her chin, too. I told her if she didn't like it, she could go out any time, the same way she came in. But, say, Sid."

"Well?"

"You go ahead with this case, just as you have begun it, and leave me out of it for a time. I wanta go ahead on my own hook for a day or two; and then, if you will come here to see me the day after to-morrow, in the evening, I think mebbe I'll have something teh tell yeh. I ain't makin' no promises, but I think I'll have something teh tell yeh then, Sid. If yeh don't ask me no questions about it, jest now, I won't tell yeh no lies; I won't tell yeh nothing at all—not now. But, yeh jest wait till the time I said, and then see."

CHAPTER IX.

THE BEGINNING OF THE TRAIL.

It has been intimated several times that the woman known to us as Cartouche was probably an adept at all sorts of disguises; that she was at the head of an organization, the members of which probably obeyed her without question; that she was resourceful, shrewd, and possessed of a degree of daring which almost any man might have envied.

Just how wonderfully skilled and expert she was, in everything that she undertook to do, will appear in the events that followed quite closely upon that call, made by the detective, upon Santiago Webster, when the latter was found bound and helpless in his room.

When Nick descended in the elevator, after parting with Webster, he was somewhat puzzled by that last statement of the cattle king, for that it was significant of something that had happened between Webster and Cartouche, during the time that Cartouche was in Webster's rooms, he did not doubt.

Also, that it was something which Webster might have told if he would, but which he had given his word not to tell, the detective was equally certain.

The time was not yet one in the morning, and the hotel was still in full blast; and Nick sought the telephone booths and told the operator that he desired to speak at once with the courier, or the maid, or the countess herself, in the rooms of Countess de Trouville.

It was Mrs. Peters who answered his call, for, as we know, she was acting in the capacity of chaperon to the supposed young countess; and five minutes later she met Nick in one of the parlors, at his command.

"Miss Jones has gone to bed," Mrs. Peters told the

detective. "She has been in the big dining room all the evening, nearly, and I was with her. She thought she would hear from you earlier than this, and just now when I told her that you had called up on the phone, and was here in the hotel, she said to tell you that she would dress and come down at once if you wished her to do so."

"No. It isn't necessary. Have Patsy and Mrs. Garvan retired, also?"

"Yes. Half an hour ago. I was on the point of doing so myself."

"Very well; I will detain you but a moment. You can tell Miss Jones, and all of them, in fact, what I wish them to know."

"Yes, sir; I think so."

"And I want you to be particular to deliver my messages, just as I give them."

"Certainly."

"First, before I begin, did Miss Jones wear the scarab when she went to the dining room, to-night?"

"Yes, sir; quite prominently."

"Did she see or hear anything in the dining room that interested her?"

"I think not. I did not hear her mention any such occasion."

"Very well. This is the message I want you to give to her, and to the others as well; and they must discuss it between them afterward."

"Yes, sir."

"Cartouche—the lady of the scarab—is probably staying here, at this hotel. She made another call upon Webster, at his rooms to-night, although she made no attempt to rob him. All that she did take was a plain gold ring that Webster has worn for a long time, on the little finger of his left hand. She put it on the third finger on her left hand.

"She remained in Webster's rooms an hour and a half, after tying him with some wires, so that he could not move, and compelling him, at the point of that vitriol cane of hers, to submit to it. While she was there, she talked a good deal, but she said nothing of importance that I can find out. What she did do, was to make a thorough examination of Webster's rooms—of the entire suite, mind you—and search through his desk, reading his letters and going over his private papers. He says that he has no idea what she did it for, and does not know if she took any of the letters away with her.

"She went to that suite of rooms in full evening dress, and wore a hat, and a wrap of some kind—probably an opera cloak. I think they were worn merely to avoid attracting attention as she passed through the corridors, and also to give Webster the impression that she came into the hotel from the outside. Are you following all this, and can you remember it, Mrs. Peters?"

"Yes, sir; perfectly."

"I am coming now, to what I deem the important item of that call she made upon Webster."

"Yes, sir."

"When I was on the point of leaving him, he told me that he would have something important to tell me, during the evening of the day after to-morrow.

"Now, I want you to tell Miss Jones that if my idea about the case which she seemed to think was preposterous—and which I now, more than ever believe to be the true theory—I want you to tell her that if my idea about the woman was at all correct, the thing that Webster will have to tell me about, the day after to-morrow, is an interview between him and Cartouche which he has agreed shall take place under conditions that she has made. Have you got that?"

"Yes, sir."

"In other words, either he has asked for an interview when he shall not be tied down, or she has proposed one to him, and in either case she has made him swear that he will not say one word in regard to it. His promise to her, which he will keep, and which she knows he will adhere to because she has studied the man, probably holds only until the meeting has taken place, and that is why he thinks he will have something to tell me at the time he has mentioned. Now, Mrs. Peters, tell Ida this: I shall not return to my house at all, when I go away from here. I shall go to some other place and disguise myself so that even Patsy and Chick will not recognize me if they see me. I shall do this because Webster has told me enough to make it certain in my mind that Cartouche is keeping rather good tabs on what we are doing from my office. Have you absorbed all that, Mrs. Peters?"

"Yes, sir. I can repeat all that you tell me, almost word for word."

"Tell Ida that it will be best that she should not wear the scarab any more; that Webster told Cartouche that I had it in my possession, and that she can do probably better without it. I only hope that it has not been noticed already. I did not give one of the duplicates to Webster, that I had had made for him. Understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"I shall not be at home to-morrow or the day fol-

lowing, so Miss Jones need not attmpt to make any report to me. She must play the game on her own responsibility, from now on."

"Very well, sir."

"But at all times, from now till Ida sees me again, I will be somewhere near Webster. I shall not lose sight of him for a moment if I can help it, and if, as I suppose, there is an oppointment to which he has agreed, for him to meet Cartouche, I shall not be far away from them when that meeting takes place.

"And if the meeting should take place, sir?"

"One of them will go from it, directly to the headquarters of police."

"And all our effort here, at the hotel, will have gone for nothing."

"No; it will have accomplished a great deal, in fact."

"How is that, sir?"

"Because I think that the very fact that Cartouche did see the scarab that Ida wore in the dining room to-night, is what sent her to the rooms of Santiago Webster; because I am quite sure now that her chief purpose in going there to-night, was to ask Webster about the ornament, and that all the rest of the things she did in that room, was done as a blind to her real reason; and because if she had not gone there, the appointment would not have been made."

"So, even if that is all that has been accomplished, sir, by our coming here——"

"Yes, Mrs. Peters, if all that has been accomplished by the presence of Countess de Trouville in this hotel, is a clandestine appointment between Cartouche and Webster, the chief purpose of the whole case will have been won, since it will lead Cartouche into my knowledge, and therefore, to prison. That is all."

"Then Miss Jones is to go ahead just as she was instructed in the first place, save for wearing the scarab?"

"Yes. In case I should wish to communicate with any of you, I will use the telephone."

"And there will be no way to communicate with you?"

"Not until you have seen me, or have heard from me again; no."

"There are no further orders, and no questions, sir?"

"Perhaps a question or two. You say you were in the dining room with Miss Jones, to-night, that she wore the scarab prominently in view, and that nothing of interest happened."

"Yes, sir."

"Now, I am reasonably certain that Madam Cartouche must have seen that emblem, at that time, or that it was seen by another and reported to her."

"That is possible, of course."

"Mrs. Peters, you are a close observer. Your constant familiarity with my household and my work have made you more so than you might otherwise have been. So, tell me if you noticed any person in the dining room to-night, who seemed to be attracted by the scarab that Ida Jones was wearing, as the Countess de Trouville."

"There were several people who almost stared at Miss Jones, sir, but—well, they may have been looking at the ornament, although at the time I supposed them attracted only by Miss Jones, herself. She is very attractive, dressed as she was to-night."

"I know. Then there were only men who looked at her so?"

"Yes, sir; only men, that I took notice of."

"You speak in the plural. Were they together, or did that sort of interest occur at different times?"

"Those that I noticed—the only ones I did notice at all, sir—were seated three tables away from us. There were three of them, with one woman. The woman was seated with her back toward us, so I did not see her face. She did not turn around."

"But the men noticed the scarab?"

"I thought it was Miss Jones herself that they took notice of, sir."

"Tell me what they did?"

"One of them, the one who sat directly facing us, kept staring till it annoyed Ida a little, although she said nothing. Then he spoke to the other men, one at each side of him, and they turned their heads to look. Then one of them spoke to the woman, and she shook her head and said something which made them less obtrusive in their acts. All the same, after that, I caught them several times looking furtively at Miss Jones, I thought."

"The woman did not look around at all?"

"No, sir; and she left the table before the men did, and before we had finished at ours."

"What time was that?"

"Shortly after nine, sir."

"Describe the woman."

"I only saw her back, sir. She was middle-aged, at least. She was all made up with powder and enamel, and cosmetics. I could see enough for that. Her hair would have been gray, I am sure, if chemicals hadn't been used on it to make it red."

"Nevertheless, Mrs. Peters, she was probably young.

Tell Ida that the woman was probably Cartouche, and that she left the table, just at the right moment to have removed her disguise and to have appeared at Webster's door when she did. Tell her to try to remember the men who were with the woman, so that she can point them out to Patsy, and—that is all for tonight."

CHAPTER X.

WEBSTER GETS A SUMMONS.

When Nick Carter left the hotel that night—or rather that morning, for it was past one o'clock when he did go—he was not at all sure that he was not followed and spied upon, although if that were so, he could discover no evidences of the fact.

Nevertheless, the things that Webster had told him, had gone far to convince him that the remarkable woman called Cartouche, must indeed have a perfect organization behind her, to assist her in carrying out her schemes.

When Webster told her that Nick Carter was on that Pullman car, where she had chloroformed and robbed him, she told him that she was aware of that fact; and if that were so, it followed that she had not been alone on the train, and that one of her confederates was ready to inform her when Webster and Nick Carter were both out of the car so that she could enter the stateroom and await Webster's return to it.

Again, if it were true that it was Cartouche with the three men at table in the dining room when Ida Jones was there, wearing the scarab, she would, in the light of her other information, have at once arrived at the conclusion that the scarab she had deposited in the pocket of Webster's waistcoat, had been given to Nick Carter, and that the woman who then wore it, was therefore in Nick Carter's employ.

And again, if Cartouche were wise to all that, and had left the dining room to make the late call at Webster's suite of rooms, she would not have dared to remain so long in them unless there had been some one on guard near the door, to warn her of any approach to it which might be dangerous to her interests.

And still again, she would have been informed of Nick Carter's later visit to Webster; it was even possible that she had left the man tied fast in his chair, believing that the detective would be the one to appear and liberate him; and prepared, herself, to have it done by others than the hotel servants, in case he did not appear.

And, lastly, if all that were true, then there was no doubt that one or more of her confederates would endeavor to keep Nick Carter in sight after he should leave the hotel.

At all events he took his precautions exactly as if all that were the fact to be carefully guarded against—and he did the simplest thing that he could have done to throw such persons off the track.

He went directly to his own home, admitted himself with the latchkey, passed down the stairs to the basement, and thence to the underground passageway which leads to the other house, and with which the readers of the Nick Carter histories are familiar, and so on, out again, and thence downtown by the subway.

At three o'clock in the morning he awakened a friend of his, in Brooklyn; and at seven in the morning he left that house again, although had you seen him descend the front steps of it, you would never have supposed that the man was Nick Carter.

The man to whose house he had gone at that unseemly hour of the night, was a minister, as it happened, and the man who descended the steps in the early morning, also appeared to belong to the cloth, for Nick had, for the day, and possibly for the next one, borrowed the personality and the garb of his friend.

Why? Merely that he should wear a disguise that he had never adopted before. There was no particular reason why he selected that of a minister, other than that one.

He returned at once to the Mammoth, registered, and took a room; and then he seated himself upon one of the corridor chairs, and waited for Webster to appear.

We need not follow the events of that day, which were unimportant, save in the fact that Webster clung close to the hotel, not leaving it at all, even for a moment; and Nick noticed that he had the air, all the time, of one who is waiting for something.

"It is not difficult to guess what that something is," was Nick's thought. "It is evident that Cartouche did not make an appointment with Webster, but only agreed to make one, and promised to send word to him about it. That is what is keeping him inside the hotel."

All that day Nick watched Webster, never permitting himself to be very far away from the man; but he neither heard nor saw anything that was of interest, or

that suggested the receipt of any message by the ex-cow-puncher.

Several times during the day Nick caught sight of Ida, and twice he saw Patsy; but he kept himself aloof from them. In fact he was partly using them as blinds, just then, for he had not a doubt that Cartouche at least suspected that Ida Jones—the Countess de Trouville—was at the hotel in the interest of her enemies; and he knew that as yet the woman of the scarab had not spotted him.

He looked for the middle-aged woman with the red hair that Mrs. Peters had described, but he saw nothing of her; nor of any men who might be the ones to whom Mrs. Peters had referred.

Evening came, and still Webster did not leave the hotel; but Nick noticed that he became more and more anxious as the hour grew later, and so kept even closer to him; and, at last, as luck would have it, Webster dropped his great bulk into the chair next to the one that Nick was occupying in the main corridor.

"The loneliest place in all the world is in the midst of a crowd of strangers," said the detective to him, in a tone that was intended to be half ministerial; and Webster half turned toward him and stared.

"Uh-huh," he said, at last. "But I'm stuck on being lonely, myself, sometimes—and this is one uh them."

Webster got up and moved away again, and Nick smiled. Plainly the cattle king was not seeking company, so it must be near the time when he should receive the unexpected message, if it was to arrive at all.

And it did come, very soon after that.

A postal telegraph messenger boy came down the corridor, straight toward Webster, as if he knew the man perfectly well by sight, and without asking a question, he gave a sealed envelope into the ex-cow-puncher's hand; and the instant he had done so, he darted away toward one of the side entrances to the hotel, to gain which he had to pass close to the detective; and the latter left his seat and stopped the boy, keeping an eye upon Webster in the meantime.

"Here, my son," he said. "Wait a moment. Wait a moment, won't you?"

"Sure, sir. What is it?"

"Would you like to earn an extra dollar on your way back to the office?"

"Gee, but it's raining extras to-night. Sure I would. How? And I ain't going back to the office. I'm off duty. I'm going home, so if it ain't too far——"

"It is only a few blocks," said Nick. "Wait a moment."

He drew a blank envelope from one of his pockets, and from the envelope, a blank half sheet of paper; and on the paper he wrote these words:

"Find out where this boy got the note he delivered to Webster just now, and how he happened to know Webster by sight. Pay him for the information. N. C."

He placed that message inside the envelope, sealed it, addressed it to Chick at his own house, knowing that Chick would probably have just arrived home from out of town, and gave it to the lad.

"Deliver that," he said, "and wait to see if there is an answer. If you do that, you will earn more than this dollar. Now, hurry."

The boy was gone like a shot, just as Webster, with a broad grin of pleasure on his face, returned his own letter to its envelope, and deposited it in one of his pockets. Then he shrugged his massive shoulders, went to the bar and took a big drink—and went directly to the elevator.

Nick strolled over to the desk of the carriage clerk of the hotel, and stood there, near enough so that he could hear any order that might be given; and presently one came—the one he had more than half expected would come.

"A car—not a taxi—at the south entrance, for Mr. Webster, in twenty minutes," said the hall boy who delivered it; the other had come directly from the hotel desk, to which Webster had telephoned it down, from his room.

The carriage clerk left his perch for a moment, passed through the corridors of the hotel to the south entrance, and signaled to one of the chauffeurs who were waiting there.

"Bring your car to the door for Mr. Webster," he said. "Take good care of him. You have never had him before, but there is always a ten-dollar tip, and I get half. See?"

"All right," said the chauffeur.

"And sometimes it's a twenty, and I get half of that, too; understand?"

"You'll get half of all he gives me," was the reply, and the clerk went away.

Nick followed the chauffeur to the car, which stood some distance down the street, and just as the man was about to climb upon his seat, Nick accosted him.

"Chauffeur," he said, in a low tone, stepping close to the man, "do you want to earn a hundred-dollar bill in a very short time, and without doing anything but keep out of sight and wait?"

"Huh; what are you giving me, mister? That is

a queer proposition for a minister to make, ain't it? Take my advice and leave the booze——"

"I'm talking business, chauffeur, and there isn't any time to waste in chaffing. I'm not a minister; I am a detective, and I have come out to-night to keep watch over the safety of the man you are going to drive in your car. Here is my proof that I am what I say;" and Nick opened his coat, pulled forward his suspender on the right side, and showed his badge—for he did often wear a headquarter's badge, and happened to have one on that night; one that the commissioner had suggested that he should wear. "At the best you will not make more than twenty for your night's work, and I offer you a cold hundred. Fifty down, on the nail, and fifty more—later."

"Let me see the color of the fifty, to know that you ain't joshing; then I'll talk to you—maybe," was the cautious reply.

Nick displayed a roll of bills that made the chauffeur's eyes bulge.

"What do you want me to do?" he asked.

"Lend me your overcoat, cap, goggles, and gloves—and the car. I want to drive Mr. Webster to-night. Then go to Billy Paterson's all-night place and wait there for me till I show up and you can have the other fifty, and take the car back to the garage. I'll have left Mr. Webster here, then."

"How do I know that you ain't a thief, looking to rob him, and how do I——"

"This badge ought to answer that. Come, there isn't any time to talk about it. I will make it a hundred down, and fifty more when I return the car, where I said. Here is the money. Get out of that coat, and the rest of it, quick."

The temptation was too great. The man fell. The exchange was made—inside the car, so that no one should observe them in making it. The chauffeur fished another cap out of the tool box and deposited Nick's discarded hat in it.

"I'll wait at Billy Paterson's for you, if it takes a week," he said, without hesitation.

"And I will be there with the car within a few hours; there isn't any doubt of that," Nick replied. "Here is your hundred, and if you are discreet and careful, perhaps I'll make the second payment, as much more. I'll see about that."

"Can you drive the car all right?"

"Better than you can. Skip, now."

"I'm off. Say, if anything happens to that passenger, I'll look for you, and I'll——"

Nick did not hear the finish of that sentence, for already he was under the steering wheel and had started the car forward. He had succeeded better than he had dared to hope; but there are times when an impulse followed on the spur of the moment succeeds even better than long-cherished plans.

CHAPTER XI.

THE WOMAN AT LAST.

Nick Carter's intention in pursuing Webster to the scene of that interview—or, as it happened, in literally taking him to it—was not at all for the purpose of hearing what might be said between the man and the woman; he had no interest in that, whatever. He went there merely to find the woman, and to arrest her, and make her answerable to the law for breaking it as she had done.

But as it happened, he had to hear some of the things that were said, and so much as he did hear, we will repeat.

And the interview, be it said, took place in one of the fashionable residences on upper Fifth Avenue, which, as it was afterward established, had been rented, furnished, for a short season, to a person who had secured it for the uses of the woman of the scarab; to Cartouche, in a word.

Nick was amazed when he received the direction from Webster, who did not suspect his identity, of course; he was still more so when he stopped before the door, and found that the house was indeed a palatial one.

The detective was told to wait at the curb. Webster ascended the steps, and the front door opened to receive him without his having to wait; and then Webster returned almost at once, handed a twenty-dollar bill to Nick, and told him that he could go; that his services would not be needed any more.

And Nick went—around the corner. But he stopped there, put the spark plug in his pocket, and returned afoot to the front of the house on the avenue.

It was nearly dark inside when he had first approached it; it was the same now. A light shone from the front windows on the second floor, and a dim one from the glass over the front entrance; that was all.

Nick had discarded the overcoat, and the goggles, and the gloves, at the car; now he ran up the steps to the house, and after waiting a moment, used his matchless little picklock, and quickly admitted himself to the house without sound.

The murmur of voices from a rear room told him where the two in whom he was interested were talking together, and he stepped into the larger room at the left of the hallway, and passed through it until just behind some portière curtains which were the only things that separated him from Webster and Webster's companion.

At first he could not see into the room; but he could hear what was said; and he very much wished to have one look at the woman herself, before he entered her presence, which he was fully determined to do, almost at once.

"It is a very great kindness for you to permit me to come here to see you," Webster was saying, as Nick approached the curtains; and she retorted, with some irony:

"You have at least paid well for the privilege."

"Perhaps, madam, I do not consider the price too exorbitant," he said to her. And Nick wondered that the man could use such good language. But after a moment he lapsed again into his accustomed drawl and half dialect.

"This is a great confidence that I have reposed in you," she said to him. "If I thought that you would ever betray it—but I know you will not. You are not that sort of a man."

"No, ma'am, I'm not; not a little bit. I'm all wool and a yard wide, as you will find, if you care to trust me further."

"Yet, you are seeking me, and you are paying a detective to seek me; and even now, at the hotel, where he thinks I am staying, he has a man and three women, watching; and one of them wears the scarab that I put into your pocket, on the Pullman."

"Say, ma'am, why did you put it there? Will you tell me that?"

"In order that you would take it, and wear it."

"But why?"

It was at that instant that Nick pulled back one of the curtains just enough so that he could see into the room; and he was not surprised at the enthusiasm that Webster had used in his description of Cartouche.

She was amazing in her almost matchless beauty. She was tall and slender, and exquisite, and so charming that even Nick Carter gazed upon her in wonder. He understood, now, why Webster was more than half in love with her; why the man of so many millions was content to put aside the loss of a few hundred thousands, for an opportunity to talk with her, and to be with her, alone.

She stood facing him. Her eyes were raised toward his, for he was very tall, it will be remembered, and she had to look up to him.

And he was looking down into her eyes with all his soul in his own, and Nick could see that even now the man was bewitched; that she had already won him, and could now do as she pleased with him, should she choose to exert herself.

"Why?" he repeated, taking a step nearer to her, from which she made no effort to retreat. "Why did you wish me to wear the scarab?"

"Only because it is mine, and it is known to be mine, to all who know me. Because it is a talisman of safety, and would save you where nothing else would. Because, with that scarab pinned in your tie, you could go into the worst haunts on earth, and be perfectly safe, even though the men and the women you would find there, had never seen me, and did not know in the least what I am like. That is all. But now—now that Nick Carter has had it, and has let one of his creatures wear it, its usefulness is past."

"I will get it back again, ma'am."

"See that you do so—and return it to me."

"No. I will keep it, and wear it."

"Indeed no; you must return it to me, Mr. Webster."

"I will give it back to you—if you will let me give you something else with it," he said, reaching out one hand and grasping one of hers; and she did not take it away; not even when he drew her unresistingly toward him for half the distance that still separated them; but there, she held back, and she asked, with a warm smile in her eyes:

"What is it that you would give me with the scarab?"

"My name."

"Your name?" she spoke in surprise, although Nick doubted that she really felt any.

"Yes. I don't know yours; I'll present you with mine. I'll marry you, if you will have me. I'll——"

"But I am a—I have stolen things. I am not——"

"Now, there, drop all that. If you marry me, you won't have to steal. I've got enough to put a stop to all that. The only thing you'll have to do, after that, will be to play your life's game on the level, 'cause if yeh don't, why I'd jest nacherly kill yeh. See?"

In his excitement he had lapsed into his drawl and Western talk.

She raised her eyes to his, and was about to re-

ply, when Nick Carter considered that the moment had come for him to interfere. He had removed every vestige of a disguise, save the clerical coat and waistcoat that he wore; and now, he parted the curtains with one sweep of his hands and stepped swiftly into the room.

The woman saw him first, and uttered a startled cry; and Webster wheeled in his tracks as quickly as a cat might have done it, and exhibited that wonderful deftness of motion which had made him a man to be feared in that West to which he had gone when it was the wild West it used to be.

And Nick Carter was not prepared for what Webster did then, for he had not in the least anticipated it, although he might well have done so had he stopped to consider the circumstances.

As Webster wheeled, he drew a gun from one of his pockets, and he had it in position with all that swiftness for which he was famed, and which had won him the title of the quickest gun man in the West, in the old days; and the muzzle of it covered Nick Carter before the latter had taken three steps forward into the room.

The woman drew back a little, and laughed softly; then she shrugged her shoulders.

"Don't kill him just yet—not yet," she said, in her peculiarly soft tones. "He is your detective, isn't he?"

Webster paid no attention to what she said. His eyes were fixed upon Nick, and they stared at him like pin points, steadily and fearlessly; and he spoke with cool deliberation.

"Sid—Mister Carter—you have butted in where yehr not wanted this time," he said. "Yeh put yehr hands over yehr head and keep 'em there till I tell yeh teh take 'em down, or there'll be a dead detective right here on the floor between where we're standin' now. I don't know as yeh know much about me, but I generally mean what I say, and that goes. So. That's right. Listenin', was yeh? Now, ma'am, if you have got any wraps in the house, yeh go an' get 'em while I wait here. Yeh see, I ain't going teh kill Sid unless he makes me do it, and I don't wanta plug him unless it's necessary. But he ain't going teh take you outa here—not so's yeh could notice it."

"What do you wish me to do?" she asked of Webster, still smiling.

"Get yehr outside clothes, and put 'em on, ma'am; and then hunt the sky line. Sid, here, is right enough from his point uh view, and if he gets the kibosh onto yeh, he'll send yeh teh prison as sure as eggs is eggs. Wait a minute.

"Carter, I'm goin' teh ask yeh teh do something for me, without orderin' yeh teh do it, and if yeh do do it, there won't be no hard feelin's. Jest turn yehr back and walk over teh the far side uh the room—over there, Sid—and keep yehr hands up, please. Thankee. Now, ma'am, if yeh'll jest step right up clost teh me, I'll whisper something in yehr ear that'll interest yeh, and will tell yeh what teh do."

"Are you going to let that man get away from you now?" the woman demanded of him.

"I reckon I am, ma'am. I ain't in the killin' business, unless it's necessary; and it ain't—jest yet. He can come and take my gun away from me, half an hour after you've gone, and I will take the consequences of assistin' you to escape the law. Now, come here, please."

There was a mirror over Nick Carter's head which Webster had not noticed, and in it the detective could see the reflection of what was taking place.

The woman went to Webster, and he bent forward to whisper to her, but he never once took his eyes from Nick Carter while he did so, although the temptation must have been great to feast them again upon the beauty of the woman before him.

The reader must not suppose that Nick Carter was calmly submitting to all this without a thought of retaliation; he was only biding his time.

He knew that Webster would not hesitate to pull the trigger of his gun, if there was any reason to do so, and if Nick Carter failed to obey the orders that had been given him, the reason would exist—and Santiago Webster could drive a nail at thirty paces.

The detective was watching for just one flicker of Webster's eyelids which would give him an opportunity to do something; and it came, just as the whispered conversation, which was much shorter than the detective had expected it would be, came to an end.

The woman turned away, and stopped, and spoke to Webster again; and Webster, for the fraction of an instant, permitted his gaze to waver from Nick Carter.

That fraction of an instant was sufficient.

Nick let his own legs give way beneath him, and dropped to the floor; and as he did so, his right arm shot out, the little weapon that was concealed in that sleeve, flew into his ready grasp, it barked spitefully, and the big revolver in Webster's grasp was knocked from his hand by the bullet, as Nick had intended it should be—and Nick darted forward, leaping from the floor to his feet in one motion, and started after the woman, who had fled.

But Webster seized Nick as he attempted to pass, and the two crashed across the table, together, bringing it down upon the floor with them; and there Nick managed to wrench himself free, and to leap again to his feet, and start in pursuit of the woman.

CHAPTER XII.

NICK CARTER'S LITTLE RUSE.

But Santiago Webster had also leaped to his feet, and in doing so he had espied his own gun on the floor, where it had fallen after it was knocked from his hand by Nick Carter's bullet.

He seized it, he raised it, and just as Nick was passing through the doorway in pursuit of the woman, he pulled it down and fired.

The detective felt the impact of the bullet, felt himself stagger, and fall, and knew that he had been hit; knew, even though he sank to the floor, that the bullet had struck him in the head, and he believed that Webster had intended to kill him.

But he was not killed; he knew that just as thoroughly well, although for a moment he was paralyzed in every nerve, and practically incapable of motion.

He looked up, and saw that Webster was looking down upon him with a grin on his face, as if he enjoyed the thought of what he had done; and, vaguely, he heard Webster say:

"I didn't hurt yeh none, Sid; I only stunned yeh. I can cut a single spider's web with a forty-four, at sixty yards, every time, and I jest grazed yehr skull; that's all. I didn't want yeh teh ketch the——"

That was as far as he got.

With the suddenness with which Nick Carter's strength had left him, it returned; and for once in his life Nick Carter almost lost his temper.

With that same quick motion he had used once before during that scene, he leaped to his feet in one effort, and both of his fists shot out so closely together that the blows delivered by them fell almost as one; and one of them caught Webster on the point of the chin, and the other one was planted directly in the pit of the stomach, and he went down like a stricken bullock.

Nor did the detective wait to see him writhing upon the floor from the effects of that stomach blow. He darted after the woman, and the open front door of the house told him at once the way she had taken.

And then, as he dashed out of the house, with blood from the slight scalp wound he had received streaming down his face, he saw that luck had favored her again, and that she had shouted at, and caught a passing taxicab, had pushed the driver from his seat to the pavement, and was already speeding away down the avenue, driving the taxicab herself.

Without pausing for an instant he ran around the corner to the place where he had left the car in which he had taken Webster to the house. He shot the plug into place, cranked the engine, and started forward, almost in a breath, and drove out upon the avenue in pursuit of the fleeing taxi by the time it had covered half a dozen blocks.

But luck was against Nick Carter that night, somehow.

The car he was driving was speedier than the taxi, and he might soon have overtaken it had his usual luck been with him; but he had not gone those six blocks before he got a puncture in the tire of one of his rear wheels, and he had to come to a dead stop, and sit there and watch the taxi speed away from him.

He left the car where it was and ran back to the

house, reaching it just as Webster appeared at the top of the steps; and Nick, still angry at the man for all that had been done to spoil his plans, covered him instantly with one of his own guns.

"You come down out of that, Webster," he ordered. "I'll take you in, anyhow; and I'll send you to prison for assault with intent to kill, if you don't tell me this instant, what you whispered to that woman."

"Yeh can send me teh he—Hades if yeh wanta, Sid, and then I won't tell yeh," was the cool reply. "And yeh needn't put on any airs, either, Sid, because I ain't going teh fight yeh, no matter what yeh do. I'm up against it, I know, but I ain't never yet betrayed my word when anybody trusted me, and I'll swear that it looked as if I had done that very thing when yeh butted into this affair. I'm yehr prisoner, and I'll report wherever yeh say, and yeh needn't take the trouble teh take me there, either."

Nick returned the gun to his pocket.

"All right," he said coldly. "Go back to the hotel to your rooms, and stay there till I call for you. I'll see then what is to be done. Here, you;" he called to a negro who was passing. "You go to that car, and stay with it until I send a man after it. He will give you ten dollars for your trouble, when he comes."

"No, he won't," said Webster. "I'll stay with the car myself; and I'll stay with the house, too, since it seems to be left all alone, to take care of itself."

It was an unfortunate remark, so far as his own plans were concerned, for it struck the detective instantly as containing more meaning than appeared on the surface. He cast just one glance at Webster's face—and instantly decided what to do.

"All right," he said. "You watch the car, and I'll send for it within an hour. Then, Webster, you go to your rooms at the hotel. You can't get away; you are too well known, and you've got to suffer for this night's work."

He turned away without another word, and on a run, hurried to the corner, turned it, and sped onward a little way toward Madison Avenue. Then he slowed down and continued more leisurely until he had turned the next corner, from where he simply made his way around the block, and so, back again to the front of the house where so much had occurred in such a short time.

Webster was no longer on the steps of the house, but down the street, from the direction of the big car with the punctured tire. Nick could see him returning, and he judged, and correctly as it happened, that Webster had after all engaged the services of the negro, and was now returning to the house to wait there.

For what?

For the return of the woman, whom he expected to return there, as a result of that whispered conversation they had held together, if Nick Carter had guessed correctly, and he believed he had done so. Nick thought he had read that much in that remark of Webster's about staying with the house.

And what more natural that in the haste that was necessary, Webster should have said to her, something like this:

"Get your things. Go outside. Pretend that you are going away. Come back here in half an hour, or an hour, and wait here for me. I will let him go after you. He will never think that you have returned here. Then we will finish what we were talking about, and if you want to do it, all the detectives in the world shan't take you away from me," or something to that effect.

Nick darted forward and up the steps before Webster could see him. The door was still open, and he passed through it, closing it after him, determined to keep Webster on the outside for the present.

But Webster did not attempt to reënter the house. He came and stood upon the steps, looking down the avenue, and seeming not to notice that the house door was closed; perhaps he did not remember that he had not closed it after himself when he came out of it. Then, the chauffeur whom Cartouche had thrown into the street from his seat, came limping back, and Nick, through the parlor window, saw Webster pass him a yellow-back bill which made the eyes of the man bulge; and after that the two stood together, talking in low tones.

Half an hour passed, and then the two turned suddenly to look up the avenue; and Nick saw the chauffeur nod to Webster, and say something; and a mo-

ment later the taxicab that Cartouche had stolen so deftly and certainly, drew up at the curb with a flourish, and came to a stop. A new driver was at the wheel, but the door opened, and Cartouche stepped from the cab to the pavement.

Webster ran down the steps to meet the woman, and Nick sped through the hall of the house to the telephone, which he had already located. He asked for police headquarters, and he said:

"Send two or three officers to this number, from the nearest station house, as quickly as they can get here. This is Nick Carter talking. No time now to explain;" and he replaced the receiver, and returned to the parlor just as the front door of the house opened to admit the woman of the scarab—Cartouche.

The instant she was across the threshold the detective stepped forward, seized her, whirled her around, and snapped handcuffs upon her wrists; and almost with the same effort he gave Webster a violent shove that sent the man reeling backward out of the house, upon the steps, and Nick Carter closed the door with a snap.

There was only the faintest kind of a light in the hall, but it was enough, Nick thought, for him to see what he was doing.

"Now, madam," he said, "I think that this farce is about played out. You are my prisoner, and as such you will remain until I see you safely lodged with your friends, in jail. You may step into the parlor, and be seated there, until some one for whom I have telephoned, arrives. You have been rather difficult to catch, but I think I have got you, at last."

She looked up at him, and smiled, appearing to be not in the least disturbed by what had happened to her.

"It is a great thing to overcome a woman, is it not?" she asked.

"Yes," he replied, "it is a great thing indeed, to overcome such a woman as you are."

"If I might make a suggestion," she said, "you might be much better employed, even now, than in waiting here, with me; but you will know about that later, Monsieur Carter. Goodness me, what is all that noise outside the house?"

Nick did not reply, but he opened the door and admitted three officers who had arrived on a run. Then he turned to her again.

"It means, madam," he said, "that these officers have come after you, to take you away, and that they will now take Mr. Webster along with them, too, since he tried so hard to deceive me at the very last. Lieutenant, this woman is charged with robbery, and this man, with aiding and abbetting her. Take them both. Webster, you will sleep one night in a cell, anyhow, unless you can get bail mighty quick, for I shall take immediate steps to see that you do not succeed in doing so to-night."

An hour later Nick found the chauffeur he had bribed, and paid him what he had promised; and sent him after his own car. Then he went to his own house and from there called up the Hotel Mammoth, and asked for the apartments of Countess de Trouville.

"It's all over, Ida," he said, over the telephone. "You may think that you did nothing at all in the case, but as a matter of fact, you did it all—all but the final capture—by sitting at the table in the dining room of the hotel with the green scarab pinned at your throat. If it had not been for that, Cartouche would not have sought Webster in his rooms and would not have made an appointment with him which enabled me to find her. There are times when what one tries to do, gives bigger results than what one succeeds in doing."

THE END.

"The Strangest Case on Record; or, Nick Carter's Guessing Contest," is the story for the next issue. The odd case of a prominent Western capitalist and a beautiful adventuress, with which we are now somewhat familiar, is once more before us with new and startling developments; and Nick finds himself in a quandary, the solution of which can only be arrived at by a process of very imaginative guessing. The final climax and explanation of the mystery is about as unexpected as anything you could well conceive. No. 742. Out March 18th.

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